

MIKE SHAYNE

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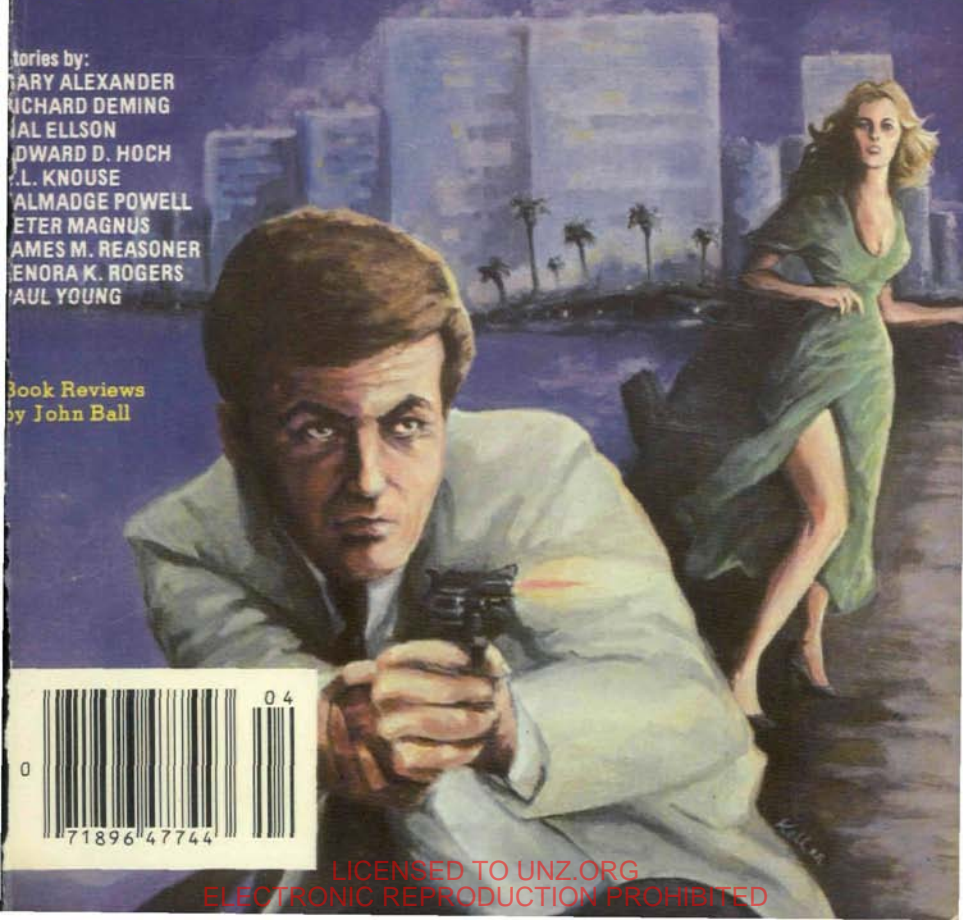
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FIT FOR A CORPSE

by Brett Halliday

Tied in the chair, Shayne couldn't dodge the blow. The fist cracked into his head, and pain shot through his body. They wanted him awake, the detective thought grimly, so he could feel everything they did to him! 6

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Mike Shayne

Mystery Makers

RICHARD DEMING (*Mother Love*) sends us the following autobiographical update:

The year 1980 was one of disappointments and unrealized goals for the Deming family. First, the Pulitzer Prize judges must have somehow learned that for political reasons I planned to refuse the prize, and got their revenge by not offering it. Second, my charming wife barely missed being selected as Miss California when three of the five judges withdrew their votes upon learning she was a fifty-six-year-old grandmother. Third, my oldest daughter failed to win the Nobel Prize in physics for her invention of a defogging device for contact lenses. (She is the one whose husband works for MacDonald's and supplements the family income by moonlighting as a part-time brain surgeon). Fourth, my youngest daughter was nosed out of the Guinness Book of World Records for the longest non-stop nagging (72 hours) by a woman in Belgrade who nagged her husband for only seven minutes longer.



Otherwise it was a good year.

JAMES M. REASONER (*Outback*) is:

the author of over 50 short stories and novelets, as well as a Private Eye novel entitled TEXAS WIND. At present, he is collaborating with his wife on an historical novel to be published by Fawcett Books. When not writing, he loves to read, and the pulpier the book the better. He lives in Azle, Texas with his wife Livia, eight cats, and the ghost of a Comanche Warrior.

**TALMADGE POWELL** (*The Beacon*) tells us:

Have been writing all of my adult life. Published about 500 short stories and novelettes in national magazines. Published 16 books under my own name, 2 under pen names, ghosted 4 others. Have scripted as in-residence writer at Universal Studios on two occasions. Have had several network television appearances of stories and/or plays, including the "Alfred Hitchcock" show. Have been translated into all languages of western Europe, plus Slovak. Adaptations for TV of translated stories made in France, South Africa, and Czechoslovakia. Have been anthologized 40 to 50 times in both hardcover and paperback. Find writing the hardest kind of work, which proves, I suppose, that a few gluttons for punishment are always around.

Continued on page 66

FIT FOR A CORPSE

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**



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MIKE SHAYNE LEANED BACK IN THE OLD comfortable chair behind the desk in his office and threw down his pen. A scowl drew his bushy red eyebrows over his grey eyes. He ran his thumbnail along his jaw, feeling the stubble that was nearly always present. There was no getting around the fact that he was bored.

He knew what was causing the boredom. It wasn't the paperwork he was struggling through. He had never liked paperwork that much, but it was part of his job as a private detective, and he had accepted it long ago as a necessary evil. No, the thing that bothered him was that Lucy Hamilton wasn't in the office today.

Lucy was more than a secretary to Shayne and had been ever since they met years before. Shayne's two-room office on Flagler Street always seemed emptier and bleaker than usual when Lucy wasn't there to brighten it up with her smile and her laugh. If she had been there, she would have broken up the wearisome monotony of this long day. But she wasn't at her desk in the outer office and wouldn't be. Instead, she had gone up the coast a little way to visit a great-aunt who had just moved to Florida. Shayne couldn't complain about that, and anyway, he had told himself, it was just for the one day, and she would be back tomorrow.

In the meantime, what he needed was something to do, something besides writing up reports on minor cases. He pushed the paperwork aside, propped his big feet up on his desk, and lit a cigarette. His position, leaning back, gave him a good view of the ceiling.

Which was why he didn't see the shadow on the glass of the outer door, as someone paused in the corridor outside the office. But he heard the knock plainly enough through the open connecting door, and his feet came down off the desk. He stood up, revealing his height and rangy, powerful frame, and strode into the outer office.

The knock came again. It was a soft, almost hesitant sound. Shayne could see the outline of the figure outside now through the pebbled glass. It had the shape of a man, although it was blurred and distorted by the glass. Shayne reached for the doorknob. The door wasn't locked; he wondered why the man hadn't just come on in.

The thought stopped his fingers inches from the knob. He had been a private detective for a long time, and he had made a lot of enemies in that time. The figure outside could be one of those enemies, come to repay an old score and wanting to make sure he got the right man.

Shayne stepped back away from the door quietly. He went into the inner office again and sat down behind the desk. It was old and scarred, but it was also heavy and would at least slow a bullet down. Shayne opened the middle drawer and wrapped his fingers around the

butt of the pistol that rested there. He could see the door into the hall very well from here, and as he watched it, he heard the diffident knocking again.

He raised his voice. "Come in, it's open."

Shayne's eyes followed the movement of the figure as it reached for the doorknob. He saw the knob turn, saw the door start to swing open . . . A man stepped inside.

Shayne's lips curved up in a smile. The man looked about as dangerous as toast. He was middle-aged, with a shock of rumpled grey hair, and he wore a shabby suit. A battered old hat was in his hands. He looked through the connecting door at Shayne with watery blue eyes and swallowed nervously. He said, "Hello. Are you Mike Shayne, the detective?"

Shayne nodded. "That's right. Can I help you?" He still hadn't gotten up from behind the desk, and his fingers were still clutching the gun in the drawer. He knew only too well that looks can be deceiving.

The man came to the connecting door and swallowed again. "I sure hope you can help me," he said. "Or rather, that you can help my boy. He needs help bad."

Shayne considered. He had never met this man before, and if he was a hired killer, he was certainly doing a good acting job . . . A job that wasn't really necessary. A hitman would have tried for him as soon as he came in the door.

Shayne released the pistol and closed the drawer, standing up as he did so. "Come in and sit down," he said to the man. "You can tell me what this is all about."

The man came into the office, looking grateful that Shayne had even consented to talk to him. He perched on the edge of the client's chair and said, "My name is Peter Deegan, Mr. Shayne, and it's about my boy Ray that I've come to see you."

Shayne picked up the cigarette he had lit earlier and put it in the ash-tray. "Your son's in trouble, Mr. Deegan?"

"That's right. He . . . He's in jail."

Shayne raised an eyebrow. He had figured that Deegan might have had some other kind of trouble in mind. He had half-expected to hear that the boy had run off, or some such thing. Jail was a little more serious, though.

"In jail here in Miami?" he asked.

"No, over in Miami Beach . . . That's where we live, in Miami Beach."

Shayne rubbed at his jaw again. They were getting nowhere fast. Deegan had the look of a man who had been beaten down by unex-

pected trouble. Shayne said, "Why is your son in jail, Mr. Deegan?"

"They say he killed some people and robbed a bank."

Shayne sat up straighter. At first glance, he had thought this might turn out to be a minor case. Now it looked like there was a lot more to it than he had first supposed.

"Tell me about it," he said, slipping open his notebook and picking up his pen again. "From the first."

Deegan twisted his hat in his hands. "The first thing is, my son is a good boy. I know Ray's been in trouble before, but I know he couldn't have done what they say he did. He just couldn't." Deegan paused and wiped at some beads of sweat that had broken out on his forehead. "You heard about the robbery over on the Beach last week, I guess."

"The Federated Savings job," Shayne grunted. "I read about it. Three robbers in ski masks came in during the afternoon lull and started cleaning the place out. They had machine pistols and a couple of homemade bombs. One of the bombs went off during the robbery and fouled things up. The three guys had to clear out fast. When the smoke and dust cleared, the people in the bank saw that the blast had killed four people, three customers and a guard."

Deegan was nodding as Shayne talked. There was a little more animation in his voice as he broke in, "They say Ray was one of the robbers. That's crazy! Ray never did anything like that in his life."

"The cops must have had some reason for arresting him, though, some kind of evidence."

Deegan snorted. "They don't need evidence. What they don't have, they supply themselves."

Shayne frowned. "Wait a minute. You're accusing the Miami Beach cops of framing your son?"

"That's right. That's exactly what they did."

Shayne leaned back. He had had his problems with the Miami Beach force before, largely stemming from the animosity between himself and Peter Painter, the diminutive Miami Beach chief. But on the whole, he respected the Beach cops. He asked, "Who's handling the case?"

"A detective lieutenant named Harry Wells. I don't like that man, Mr. Shayne, not even a little bit."

SHAYNE HAD HEARD OF HARRY WELLS, and what he had heard was a mixture of good and bad. Wells was a longtime veteran of the Miami Beach force, surely not too far from retirement age by now, and he had an impressive record of convictions on his arrests. He had worked under Painter when the dapper little man was head of the

detective bureau, and he was still one of Painter's favorites now.

But Wells was from the old school, and the rumors Shayne had heard said that he was willing to do just about anything to crack a case once he was convinced of a suspect's guilt. If that included an old-fashioned third degree or some other withholding of a suspect's rights, that was all right with Wells. And Painter kept his eyes conveniently closed.

"Wells is supposed to be a good cop," Shayne said. "What makes you think he framed your son?"

"Ray told me he's innocent," Deegan said simply. "That's enough for me."

"You implied that they planted evidence against him?"

Deegan looked like he wanted to spit. "That Wells, he said he got an anonymous tip that Ray was mixed up in the robbery. He got a search warrant and roused Ray out. Claims he found one of them machine pistols and the stuff it takes to make bombs in Ray's bedroom. I know damn well it's a lie, Mr. Shayne."

Deegan was getting more and more agitated as the conversation went on. Although it had been only minutes, he didn't seem like the same defeated little man that he had been when he walked into the office.

"So Ray's in jail now?"

"That's right. The judge wouldn't set bail, since they've got him charged with murder as well as robbery. I probably couldn't have paid a big bond, anyway."

"Have you got a lawyer?"

Deegan shrugged. "Some kid the judge appointed. He wants to plead Ray guilty."

Shayne butted out the cigarette in the ashtray and said, "Just what is it you want me to do?"

"Find the truth," Deegan said urgently. "I want you to find out that Ray was framed, that he's really innocent. And I want you to find out that Lieutenant Wells framed him."

"What if it really happened the way the cops say it did? I don't manufacture evidence."

Deegan took a deep breath. "You just look into it; you'll see that I'm telling you the truth."

Shayne's fingers reached up and tugged gently on the lobe of his left ear. A case would get him out of the office for the rest of the day, anyway, even if he wound up not doing any good for Ray Deegan. It sounded like the police had a pretty solid case against him, but an investigation might make his father feel better.

Shayne was still curious about one thing, though. He asked, "Why

me? What makes you think I can help your son, Deegan?"

"Well, I read about you in the paper all the time. I saw all those stories about how you helped that baseball player. They said he killed a man, and you proved that he didn't and caught the real killer. I thought maybe you could do the same thing for Ray." Deegan looked down at his shoes. "If you're worried about your fee, well, I don't blame you, seeing as how I told you we're having to use a court-appointed lawyer and all. But I've got a good, steady job, Mr. Shayne, driving a delivery truck, and I can pay you what I've got saved up now and then pay you the rest along later."

Shayne grinned abruptly. As a rule, he made no impulsive decisions, but all rules had to be broken every once in a while. "Don't worry about that," he said. "We'll skip the retainer, and then the fee will depend on how many expenses I run up. I'll be fair about it, though."

Deegan looked up anxiously. "You mean you will take the case?"

"I'll look into it. But you'd better remember what I told you; I don't manufacture evidence or frame people, no matter what you suspect the cops have done. I will give it an honest investigation, though."

Deegan stood up and thrust his hand across the desk. "That's enough for me, Mr. Shayne. You'll see that I'm right. You'll see."

Shayne returned the handshake and said, "I hope so, Mr. Deegan."

It *would* be nice to discover something that he could rub Painter's nose in. And if Harry Wells was planting evidence and framing suspects, that needed to be brought out into the open, too.

This might not be such a boring day, after all.

II

DEEGAN LEFT A FEW MINUTES LATER, after thanking Shayne and assuring him again of his son's innocence. Shayne told him that his first move would be to talk to Ray himself. Deegan thought that was the best way to go about it. "Ray can tell you himself," he had said. "You'll have to believe him. He's a fine boy, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne was going to reserve judgment on that until after he had talked to Ray Deegan. He knew it was entirely possible that the cops were right and that Ray had been part of the bank robbery. But until Shayne had proved different to himself, there was a chance that Ray and his father were telling the truth. That chance was what sent Shayne across Biscayne Bay as soon as he had locked up the office.

As he cruised across one of the Bay causeways in his Buick, he looked at the blue water underneath him and felt the warm salt breeze that came in through the open window. This day wasn't nearly as

dreary as he had thought it would be.

Shayne grinned to himself. It was being out on a case that did it. He had always led an active life, and nothing could put him in a lousy mood quicker than inaction. Now he had something to work on, and Lucy would be back tomorrow, and things were off and running again.

It took him about twenty minutes to reach Miami Beach police headquarters, and when he got there, he went directly upstairs to Peter Painter's office. Brushing past a secretary, he opened the door to Painter's office and strolled in, tossing his hat onto a chair. "Hi, Petey," he said breezily. "Hard at work?"

Peter Painter hastily stuffed the mirror he had been holding into his huge mahogany desk and sat up straight. He was a short man, though that wasn't apparent when he was sitting down, with sleek black hair and a thin moustache. His dark eyes looked at Shayne with outright hostility.

"What are you doing here, Shayne?" he snapped. "Didn't you ever hear of knocking?"

"Sure I've heard of it," Shayne said as he sat down in a comfortable chair in front of Painter's desk. "I just figured you might be anxious to see me."

"Why in the hell would I be anxious to see you?"

"Because I'm the man who's going to keep you and your force from looking even more foolish than it already does."

Painter placed his palms down on his desk and made an obvious effort to control himself. He said slowly, "I don't have the slightest notion what you're talking about, Shayne, but I do know that I would like you to leave my office. And don't waste any time about it!"

Shayne leaned forward and dropped the smile he had put on his face. He said, "Listen, Painter, I came here to keep you from getting yourself in too deep. But if you don't want my help, then you don't have anybody but yourself to blame for not cooperating."

"Shayne . . ." Painter said wearily, "what the hell are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about the Ray Deegan case. I'm working on it now, and if you're not careful, you and your detectives are going to wind up looking like monkeys."

Painter's thin lips curved in an unpleasant smile. "The Deegan case, eh? I'm surprised at you. That old man ranted and raved about how he was going to get somebody to prove his son's innocence. I didn't think you were a big enough chump to buy his story, though."

Shayne lit a cigarette. "How do you know Ray Deegan isn't telling the truth about being framed?"

Painter laughed. He reached out and plucked a file folder from the top of his desk. "Funny you should ask," he said, tossing the folder to Shayne. "Take a look at that, shamus, and then tell me what you think."

Shayne opened the folder and saw that inside was Ray Deegan's police record. He scanned it quickly. It was pretty lengthy for a young man of 22.

Shayne looked up and shrugged. "This isn't so bad. So the kid got drunk and got in a few fights —"

"And went joyriding a time or two in hot cars," Painter put in.

"That still doesn't sound to me like he's a bank robber."

Painter clasped his hands together in front of him. The nails of his fingers were manicured to their usual precise elegance. "Look, Shayne," he said, "Harry Wells is a pro, an old pro. He doesn't make mistakes. He did everything nice and legal, got his search warrant properly and everything. Acting on an anonymous tip, he found one of the weapons used in the robbery in Deegan's apartment and also the ingredients for a bomb like the one that went off accidentally in the bank. What more do we need?"

"What does Deegan have to say about it?"

Painter waved a hand negligently. "What do you expect him to say? He denies having anything to do with it, of course. He's trying to get out of it with some crazy story about Wells planting the evidence. That's so much bunk, Shayne, and we both know it."

"Well, then," Shayne said. "If you're so sure of your case, you won't mind if I talk to Deegan, will you?"

Painter frowned. "Why should I mind? But why should you bother? You're just wasting your time."

"It's my time."

With a sigh, Painter reached over to the phone on his desk. "All right," he said. "I'll arrange for you to see Deegan. But I don't like you barging in like this, Shayne, and I'd better not catch you pulling any of those fast ones you're famous for."

Shayne grinned. "You won't catch me."

Painter shot a sharp glance at Shayne, then went back to the phone.

SHAYNE LEFT THE OFFICE A FEW MINUTES LATER with a jaunty wave, heading downstairs to the meeting Painter had set up. As he strode down the hall, he reflected back on the many clashes he had had with the Miami Beach chief. There had been a few occasions when they had been on the same side, but most of the time they had been bitter enemies. Shayne knew that Painter could be a good cop when he

wanted to be, but most of the time the chief was more worried about social climbing than solving crimes. He had a tendency to look for the easy way out, and he couldn't help but influence the whole department in that direction.

Finding the interview room didn't take long. Shayne identified himself to the guard and went into the room with its barren white walls. The only furniture was a small table and two chairs, and there was a mirror on one wall that Shayne knew was two-way. There was probably a microphone concealed in the light fixture, too. That would be typical of the way Painter operated.

Two officers brought Ray Deegan in through the door. Shayne saw a young man with a thin face and dark, longish hair. His wrists were encircled with handcuffs. As the guards half-pushed him into the room, he saw Shayne and said, "Who the hell are you, man? Another of these goddamn cops?"

Shayne shook his head. "No, I'm not a cop. You're Ray Deegan?"

"Yeah, I'm Ray Deegan." The officers stepped back and shut the door behind him, and Deegan's head snapped around. He looked at the closed door, then back at Shayne. His tongue came out and slid over his lips nervously. "You didn't tell me who you are. You're not another one of their confession experts, are you?"

"Not much chance of that." Shayne stepped closer. "My name is Mike Shayne. I'm a private detective, and your father hired me to help you out."

Deegan shook his head. "It's a waste of time, man. You can't do anything to help me. Nobody can now."

"Well, we can talk about it, anyway. Sit down." Shayne sat at the table as he spoke, and after a moment's hesitation, Deegan settled into the chair on the other side. His movements were slightly awkward as he pulled out the chair, and Shayne could tell that he wasn't used to being handcuffed.

Deegan's eyes were downcast. Shayne studied him intently for a few seconds, then spoke again. "Did Harry Wells give you those bruises? Was that what you meant by a confession expert?"

The young man glanced up, and Shayne got a better look at the mottled bruises on his face. Deegan said, "I'd rather not talk about it. It won't do any good."

Shayne thought about it, then said, "I can see why you feel that way. Cigarette?"

Deegan nodded. Shayne gave him a smoke, lit it for him, and then stood up. He strolled away from the table, toward the wall. Reaching it, he turned around and put his back against the mirror. A grin

creased his rugged face, and he raised an eyebrow at Deegan.

The young man nodded, and Shayne raised his eyes to the light fixture. Deegan nodded again in understanding, and Shayne said, "If I can't help you with the case, is there anything else I can do? Anything I can bring you? If there is, just tell me, and I'll do my best to get it to you. Your dad came to see me today, you know."

All the while Shayne was talking, Deegan was climbing carefully up onto his chair, raising himself on his tiptoes and peering into the fixture. He raised up slowly, felt around inside the fixture, and suddenly jerked, almost falling from the chair in the process. He hopped down from the chair.

"That's probably the stupidest thing I've ever done," he said, "but that mike won't be working again for a while. Now what's going on, mister?"

Shayne stayed where he was, blocking the two-way mirror. "We'll only have a few minutes," he said quickly. "Your father says you're being framed. Convince me he's right, and I'll try to do something about it."

"All right," Deegan said, coming around the table toward Shayne. "It's like this. I'm in my apartment last night when that Lieutenant Wells and his partner show up. Wells tells me they've got a search warrant. I ask him what I'm supposed to have done, and he says it's none of my damn business. I've been in trouble before, Shayne, and I know cops. I figured my best bet would be to play along with them, since I knew I hadn't done anything. I'd let them play their game and then get out of there. But Wells slapped some cuffs on me and put me up against the wall. His partner watched me while Wells tore the place apart. He came out of the bedroom with that crazy pistol and some blasting powder and caps and says I'm under arrest for murder and bank robbery."

"The pistol and the other stuff wasn't yours?"

"No way, man! I never saw it before. Wells had to have had it on him when he went into the bedroom. He was wearing a big coat; there would have been room to carry it without anybody noticing. Anyway, they brought me down here and booked me, and this morning a judge denied bail and appointed a lawyer for me."

"Wells read you your rights when he arrested you, I suppose?"

"His partner did. But I'm still being framed."

Shayne glanced at the door to the interview room. They would likely have only seconds now before it swung open. Painter's men wouldn't take kindly to having their snooping circumvented.

"Have you got an alibi for the time of the robbery?" he asked Ray Deegan.

"I sure as hell do, if anybody would just listen to it. I was with some friends of mine all that day. We went fishing up the coast."

"Their names?"

"Ron Walcott, Craig Burgess, and Monty Spann. You can find them at the Paloma Apartments; that's where I live. We all live there."

"I'll check it out," Shayne said.

"Wells told me that alibi wouldn't hold up, that any jury would believe my friends were lying for me. He said I ought to just confess and make it easier on all of us." The cuffed hands came up and touched one of the bruises gingerly. "He really tried hard to convince me he was right."

Shayne felt anger beginning to grow inside him. He didn't know Ray Deegan, had never heard of him before today. The kid had a record and seemed to have been a troublemaker most of his life. But he should still be considered innocent until proven guilty, the way Shayne saw it. And being proven guilty was not the same thing as being railroaded. Not the same thing at all.

"All right, Deegan," he said. "I'll do what I can —"

The door popped open, and an angry Painter stalked into the room. Shayne gave him an innocent smile from his position against the wall and said, "Hello again, Petey. Come to join our little discussion group?"

"Goddamn it, Shayne," Painter grated. "You get out, now! I tried to help you, even though it was against my better judgment, and you pay me back by destroying city property! I'll remember this, Shayne."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Petey," Shayne replied, pushing himself away from the wall. "But I'll leave if that's what you want."

Painter gestured to the officers with him. "Get Deegan back to his cell."

Shayne gave Deegan a grin and a thumbs-up as the young man was hustled out of the room. As soon as he was gone, the grin came off Shayne's face. He told Painter in a hard, level voice, "That boy is my client, Painter, and I've got a legal right to see him. I saw those bruises on him, and I'll know if there's any new ones on him the next time. You'd better remember that."

"And you'd better get out of my police station, Shayne, before you get locked up yourself."

"I'm going." Shayne paused at the door of the interview room and looked back at the incensed chief. "This one's going to be fun, Petey,"

he said. "The stakes are high enough for anybody. Deegan's life against a pratfall by you and your cops . . ."

III

CROSSING SWORDS WITH PAINTER ALWAYS MADE SHAYNE feel better. This time was no exception. He felt good as he drove away from police headquarters. When you came right down to it, there wasn't that much reason for optimism, but Shayne was feeling it anyway. He had no concrete proof of anything yet; the stories told by Ray Deegan and his father were all that he had to go on. But he found himself believing them, and for the moment, that was enough.

A quick stop at a phone booth and a check of the directory gave him the address of the Paloma Apartments, and he pointed the Buick in that direction. The first thing he needed to do was to confirm the alibi that Deegan had given him, his friends Walcott, Burgess, and Spann.

It didn't take him long to find the apartment house. It was in a neighborhood of similar apartment complexes, none of which were as elaborate as the apartments and condominiums closer to the Beach itself. There were quite a few parking places, since many of the occupants were at work. Shayne left the Buick in one of them and headed toward the office.

There was a row of mailboxes just outside the office, and Shayne checked them quickly. They told him that Ray Deegan was in Apartment 101, Burgess and Spann shared Apartment 102, and Ron Walcott was in Apartment 103. No wonder the four young men were friends, living in such close proximity. The apartments were down at the far end of the complex, on the ground floor, and Shayne strolled down the sidewalk in that direction.

He heard music coming from inside Apartment 103 when he paused in front of the door, so someone was home. Shayne's knuckles rapped sharply on the door, and the music shut off.

The door opened a second later. There was a chain lock on it that only let it open a few inches. A bearded face peered out at Shayne.

"Yeah? What is it?"

"Are you Ron Walcott?" Shayne asked.

"That's right. Who are you?"

"My name is Mike Shayne. I'm a private detective, and I'm working for Ray Deegan."

Walcott's pale blue eyes opened wider. He said, "Hey, I've heard of you. Just a minute."

Walcott closed the door, took the chain off, and opened it again. He stepped back and said, "Come in. I heard about what happened to Ray. You say you're working for him?"

"Yeah. He tells me that you and a couple of other friends can give him an alibi?"

Walcott was a tall young man, with dark curly hair and beard. His long-fingered hands moved nervously as he answered. "Right. Ray was with me and Craig and Monty all that day when they say he was robbing that bank. It's all so crazy anyway. Anybody who knows Ray is going to know that he wasn't mixed up in any robbery."

"Do you know if your other two friends are at home now?"

"They should be. We all work nights at one of the all-night grocery stores, so this is the top of the morning to us."

Shayne said, "You all work in the same place? And you all live here next to each other?"

Walcott shrugged. "Hell, we've been buddies since high school. We had a band once, but we had to give it up when we couldn't get enough gigs. Now we all work together. You know, like Athos, Porthos, Aramis, and D'Artagnan." Walcott grimaced. "Only it looks like there may just be three of us from now on."

"Have the police been around to see you?"

"Yeah, two guys came around, I think they said their names were Wells and, let's see, Cotten, I think it was. They asked a bunch of questions about Ray, and we tried to tell them about how he was with us that day, but they didn't seem to want to listen. That Wells, he was really coming down heavy. He said Ray's alibi was no good, that we were lying for him and that nobody would believe us."

"I've heard that before," Shayne said. "Deegan said you went fishing. Where did you go?"

"Up the coast to a little place called Palm Cove."

"Anybody see you up there?"

"I doubt it. We were surf-fishing there in the cove. Of course, a lot of people drive by on the highway while we were there, but how would you ever find them now?"

"You couldn't," Shayne mused. "What it comes down to, then, is your word. Wells has a point; a good prosecutor would make you all look suspect and a jury would probably believe that you were just covering up for your friend."

"So what do we do?" Walcott asked. "How are you going to help him?"

"There's only one way that I can see," Shayne declared. "I'll have to find the people who really pulled off that bank robbery."

"You think you can do that?"

"If I don't," Shayne said, "Ray Deegan's going to be in jail for a long time."

AT SHAYNE'S REQUEST, WALCOTT ACCOMPANIED HIM next door to the apartment where Craig Burgess and Monty Spann lived. They were both there, and they both corroborated the story that Ron Walcott had told. Burgess was short, dark, and intense, while Spann had a shock of red hair and an open, freckled face. They all seemed like average kids to Shayne, and while the whole situation seemed to make them nervous, they were all adamant in their support of Ray Deegan.

"Did Ray hire you, Mr. Shayne?" Spann asked after they had told their story.

"Actually, it was his father," Shayne said, lighting a cigarette. "He came to see me earlier this afternoon."

"I don't think Mr. Deegan has much money," Walcott said. "If we could kind of chip in and help pay you . . ."

"Don't worry about it," Shayne told them. "I've got a personal interest in this case, too." He didn't explain about his running feud with Peter Painter, but the conviction in his voice was obvious as he went on, "I promise you, Ray is going to get my top effort. I'll find out who really robbed that bank and set off the bomb. You can count on that."

"I believe you'll do just that, Mr. Shayne," Walcott said. "Ray's lucky to have you on his side."

Shayne left business cards with all three of them and told them to call him right away if they remembered anything else that might help Ray Deegan's alibi. They promised they would.

The late afternoon traffic was heavy on the causeways as Shayne headed back across the Bay toward Miami. The sun was sinking down out of sight as he came off the long bridge and turned back toward Flagler Street. He wanted to check back by the office on his way home, in case anyone had left any messages there, as potential clients sometimes did. Then he would head home for a shower and shave before going out for dinner.

What he had told Deegan's friends had been the truth. The only way he could see of cracking this case and taking Deegan's neck out of the noose was to locate the real bank robbers. Deegan's alibi was the kind that was hard to either prove or disprove. That left finding the guilty parties to clear his name.

He would be able to get a good start on that first thing in the morning. Shayne's career as a private detective had brought him into

contact with people in all walks of life, including some on the wrong side of the law. Some phone calls, maybe a few face-to-face meetings with some money changing hands, might give him a lead to someone who had recently pulled a bank job.

LIGHTS WERE STARTING TO COME ON in the windows of his office building as he pulled up and parked on the street outside. There wasn't any point in garaging the car; he didn't plan on being there long.

No one was in the lobby or in the elevator that he took up to the second floor. Some of the offices in the building were still occupied, but many of them were closed for the day, the workers having gone home. As he came out of the elevator into the second floor corridor, he saw only a cleaning woman, getting an early start on her rounds.

Shayne put his hand in his pocket and pulled out the keys to his office, which was down at the end of the hall. He had them ready to unlock the door when he saw that they wouldn't be necessary.

The door was open.

The gap was a small one, but it was definitely there. No light showed inside, in the outer office, but as Shayne stiffened and came to a stop, he saw a glow coming through the gap that meant the light in his private office was on.

He stood in the hall for a moment, thinking furiously. No one had the right to be in there except himself and Lucy, and Lucy wouldn't be back in town until later in the evening. Intruders had invaded his office more than once when he was working on a case, though. Anybody who was in there now had no business being there.

Shayne slipped his pistol out of its shoulder holster gently. If someone was waiting for him inside, the light in the hall would show them his shadow if he went to the door, just like it had shown him Peter Deegan's shadow earlier in the day. He looked up and down the corridor quickly.

The cleaning woman had disappeared into one of the other offices. She would probably be safe enough there, should there be any gunplay. Shayne crouched low, using his free hand to keep his balance, and made his way slowly and quietly to the door of his office. He took his hat off before he got there, and he didn't think anything would be showing now above the level of the glass.

Taking a deep breath, he came out of his crouch in a dive, slamming into the door with his shoulder and knocking it open. He rolled when he landed in the office, expecting the blast of a gun and the whine of a bullet near his head. Instead, he got a surprised yell.

"What the hell?" someone shouted, and Shayne used the startled voice as a target.

He surged to his feet, reaching out with his free hand and feeling the fabric of the man's coat. He jerked. The man came closer to him, and Shayne planted the muzzle of his gun in the man's stomach.

"Just stay still," Shayne growled. "I feel nervous."

In the light coming from the inner office, he could see that the man he had captured was middle-aged, and the gun barrel was digging into a soft paunch. The man wore a hat and a conservative suit. He had started to wiggle in Shayne's grasp, but the gun in his belly stopped that.

"Goddamn it, Shayne," came a voice from behind the big red-head. "Do you always make such a dramatic entrance into your own office?"

Shayne had thought the man he held looked familiar, and now the other voice confirmed the guess. He said, "Only when somebody I don't like is waiting for me, Wells."

Shayne let go of the pudgy man and took the gun away from his stomach. The man took a step backwards and shook his head. Even in the dim light, Shayne could tell that he had gone pale. "You didn't have any call to do that, Shayne," he said.

"All I knew was that somebody was in my office who didn't belong," Shayne said. "I don't like walking into traps."

The second man stepped out of the inner office. His hat was pushed back on grey hair and his hands were in the pockets of a light topcoat. It was an unusual outfit for Miami's tropical climate, but Harry Wells was getting on in years, and the nights were chilly to him.

"You know my partner, Jed Cotten, don't you, Shayne?" Wells asked in his gravelly tones, nodding to the pudgy man.

"I've seen him around," Shayne said curtly. "Do you mind telling me just what you're doing here? I don't remember inviting you."

"Take it easy, take it easy," Wells drawled. "How about putting that cannon up, okay?"

Shayne slipped his gun back into its holster and said, "You didn't answer my question."

"Just a friendly visit," Wells said. "I hear you paid a friendly visit to one of our boys over on the Beach."

"You're talking about Ray Deegan, of course. I had every right to see him; I'm working to prove his innocence."

Wells stepped closer to Shayne. The joviality had dropped out of his voice as he said, "Then you're working on the wrong side of the law, shamus. Deegan's guilty as sin, and I don't like sleazy private peepers trying to mess up perfectly good cases."

"I don't give a damn what you like, Wells," Shayne said softly. "Now get out of my office."

"We could arrest you for assaulting an officer," Cotten put in, rubbing his stomach.

Shayne smiled grimly. "You're not in Painter's bailiwick now. Will Gentry runs things on this side of the Bay, and I don't think he likes it when cops with no jurisdiction over here try to intimidate citizens. So if you want to call a cop, go right ahead."

Wells' face twisted in a sneer. "Forget it, Jed. This hardheaded bastard isn't going to listen to reason. He's got nobody but himself to blame for anything else that happens."

"That sounds like a threat," Shayne said.

"No," Wells said, shaking his head. "But you'd do well to keep it in mind."

Shayne jerked a thumb at the door. "You've had your say. I don't like it, and I'm more certain than ever that you're trying to frame the Deegan kid. I'm going to nail you on this one, Wells. Now get out."

Wells strolled to the door nonchalantly, gave Shayne another sneer, and walked out. Cotten followed him, but he paused long enough to look back at Shayne and say, "You've got it all wrong, mister. Harry Wells doesn't have to frame anybody. He always *knows* who's guilty. You'd better just stay out of Miami Beach for a while, for your own sake."

Shayne shut the door in his face.

He could have called Will Gentry and lodged a breaking-and-entering complaint against the two policemen from the Beach, but that wouldn't do anybody any good in the long run.

No, he thought, the best way to let Harry Wells know how he felt was to prove that Ray Deegan wasn't guilty. That might be easier said than done, though.

IV

LUCY HAMILTON WAS BACK AT HER USUAL PLACE behind her desk when Shayne came into the office the next morning at nine o'clock. She looked up at him with a smile and said, "Good morning, Michael. How did it go yesterday without me?"

He hung his hat on the rack, stepped behind the desk, and tilted her head up with a finger under her chin. He kissed her lightly. "Boring as hell most of the day," he said. "But then something interesting walked in."

"Oh? A case?"

"Right." Shayne propped a hip on the corner of her desk. "It was a guy whose son is in trouble. A pretty nice fella, too. The son's in jail."

"Whose jail?"

Shayne grinned. "Painter's."

"I see why you took the case. What's the boy accused of?"

"Bank robbery and murder. He's in heavy trouble, Angel; but he says he's being framed."

"Do you believe him?"

"Enough to have a look into it. Harry Wells is in charge of the case. You've heard me talk about him?"

Lucy shook her pretty head. "I don't think so."

"Rumors that he manufacturers evidence have popped up from time to time. I thought this boy deserved a better break than he'll get from Painter and Wells."

Shayne filled her in rapidly on the details of the case. Her natural sympathetic instincts were enough to make her pull for Ray Deegan, even before Shayne told her about the visit he had had from Wells and Cotten.

"Those two have something to hide," Shayne said. "If they didn't, my poking around in the case wouldn't have disturbed them so much. That was all I really needed to convince me they're trying to pull something."

Lucy nodded. "It certainly sounds like it. By the way, Michael, Tim called just before you came in. He didn't say what he wanted, but he asked me to tell you to call him back at the paper."

"Okay," Shayne grunted, standing up. He opened the door to the inner office. "I'm going to be doing some calling around as soon as I've talked to Tim. The way I see it, I've got to get a line on whoever really pulled that hold-up in order to clear Deegan."

"That could be dangerous."

"It's not as risky as staying in Painter's jail might be for Deegan, though."

HE SETTLED BEHIND HIS DESK, fired up a smoke, and dialed a familiar number. It was Timothy Rourke's direct line at the *Miami Daily News*. Rourke was one of the paper's top writers and also one of Shayne's oldest friends in Miami.

When the lanky reporter answered, Shayne said, "Morning, Tim. What's up?"

"You tell me, Mike," Rourke said. "I hear you're mixing it up with Painter and his boys again."

"I'm on a case, if that's what you mean."

"Damn straight that's what I mean. What's the story?"

"There's not one yet. I'm just conducting an independent investigation concerning someone Painter arrested."

"Ray Deegan, right? For that bank robbery job where four people got killed?"

Shayne sighed. "Why do you need me, Tim? You've got it all already."

"I don't have your connection," Rourke said. "Are you working for the kid?"

"I might be —"

Rourke brayed with laughter. "Hell, don't go coy on me, Mike. Remember, you owe me one."

"How do you figure that?"

"You didn't give me an exclusive on the Brander story. And after all the help I gave you . . ."

Shayne didn't know whether to curse or laugh. "All right," he said. "I am working for Deegan, trying to clear his name. He says he's been framed. And the arresting officer was Harry Wells."

Rourke let out a whistle. "How many people have yelled frame over the years when Harry Wells picked them up?"

"A lot, but his convictions have always stuck, right up through the appeals courts. If he's planted evidence, he's been damn good at it."

"Maybe that's exactly the case," Rourke said. "Have you come up with anything to indicate that Deegan might be innocent?"

"Not yet. The only alibi he's been able to come up with is some story about going fishing with friends. You know how much good those kind are."

"Not much, that's for sure. So what are you going to do?"

Shayne leaned back in his chair and ran his thumb along his jaw. "Find the real robbers," he said. "What else?"

"Well, good luck. Can I print this?"

"No, I'd rather you —" Shayne broke off suddenly, then went on, "No, on second thought, go ahead and use it. Play it up as big as you like. If the people who really pulled the bank job know that I'm coming after them hot and heavy, it might spook them into making a mistake."

"Yeah, and it might get you into hot water."

"I'm used to it," Shayne said.

Rourke sighed. "Well, I'll write it up and hand it in. I can't say for sure where it'll wind up, though. The sale of the paper went through last week, and Theodore Gilbert is now the chairman of the board."

"Jack Gilbert's uncle, right?"

"Right. Dirkson's been doing his best for me, but Gilbert is the fair-

haired boy around here now. The front page seems to be pretty well reserved for his stuff."

"It won't always be that way," Shayne assured him.

"I hope not. I'm getting damn sick and tired of it."

"I'll let you know what happens on this case, Tim. Talk to you later."

"Right, Mike. So Long."

Shayne hung up and spent a moment staring reflectively at the phone. It had been a long time since he had heard as much bitterness in Tim Rourke's voice as there had been when he spoke of the paper's newest reporter. And more than bitterness, there was anger there, too.

With a mental shrug, Shayne turned his thoughts to other matters. Rourke was an old pro; he could take care of his own problems.

Shayne spent some time on the phone then, putting out the word that he was interested in talking to anyone who knew anything about the Federated Savings heist. The people he talked to would talk to other people in turn, until Shayne's interest in the robbery would be common knowledge along the grapevine.

Later in the morning, he went into the outer office and said to Lucy, "I think I'll hit the streets now, Angel. I feel like I've got to get out on this one. If anybody knows anything, they might be more likely to approach me somewhere else besides here."

"What if someone calls with some information?"

"If they won't give it to you, get a number where I can call them back. I'll be checking in with you pretty regularly."

"All right, Michael."

IT WAS LATE ENOUGH IN THE MORNING that the bars were starting to come to life, and Shayne made them his first destination. He hit several in Miami where underworld characters had been known to hang out. Even in the most unsavory places, he usually had at least one friend, and while the conversations were colorful and interesting, he didn't turn up anything that might help him in proving Ray Deegan's innocence.

After a quick lunch, he called the office and listened to Lucy tell that there had been no response yet to his feelers. He reported the same lack of success, then said, "I'm heading across the Bay, Angel. Maybe I can turn up something on the Beach."

As he hung up the public phone and left the restaurant, he felt a slight prickling on the back of his neck. He stopped. Turning around slowly, he scanned the dining room of the place, then wheeled around

and studied the parking lot. Nothing looked out of the ordinary. It was just a typical restaurant doing a good midday business.

But his instincts had been through too many years of living on the edge of danger to be fooled easily. There was something wrong. He knew that, but he couldn't isolate what it was. Slowly, he walked to his car, got in, and started it. He cast a glance back at the restaurant as he pulled out of the parking lot, but no one seemed to be taking any interest in him.

He drove across Biscayne Bay to Miami Beach and started his search again. Nearly everyone he talked to had heard about the robbery, and some of them had pet theories about it, but no one could put the finger on someone they thought might be responsible for it. Things were quiet on the Beach at the moment, quieter than usual.

The feeling of wrongness stayed with Shayne, though, and he found himself checking his rearview mirror more often than usual. After a while, he had to admit that if he was being tailed, it was by an expert. The whole situation had him edgy and nervous.

It may have been that unease that caused him to let his guard down just slightly. He was coming out of a bar in a poor section of town near the Bay, and as he headed toward his Buick at the curb, he scanned the other cars parked along the narrow street. His back was to the alley that ran beside the bar.

None of the other cars at the curb had anyone waiting in them. Shayne shrugged. He was getting paranoid, he supposed.

He reached for the door of the Buick, and reflected in the glass of the window, he saw the hand clutching a pistol that came out of the alley.

Shayne threw himself to the side as the gun blasted. The slug whistled through the air where his head had been and whined off the top of the Buick. Shayne landed on the sidewalk and rolled over, grabbing for his own gun. He had it out in one smooth motion and triggered it twice.

The bullets smacked into the wall of the bar, and the hand of the attacker disappeared. Shayne leaped to his feet as he heard running footsteps receding down the alley. He sprinted to the corner of the bar and poked his head around it. A bullet slapped past his head.

The footsteps hadn't stopped. That meant there were at least two of them. Shayne dove into the mouth of the alley. His gun came up, and he was squeezing the trigger even as he landed on the dirty concrete. He caught a glimpse of a running figure, saw it stagger suddenly. A cry of pain came to his ears, and then the figure disappeared from sight around a corner.

No one was returned Shayne's fire now, and he thought that the other one had probably ducked away, too. Getting to his feet, he ran down the alley, keeping his gun ready. No more shots came his way, though. The alley opened into a larger alley, with more branching off from it, and there was no telling where the snipers had gone.

Shayne sighed and headed back toward his car. He kept his gun out until he got there, then jammed it back in its holster as he got into the car. He wanted to be out of the neighborhood before any cops could arrive to check out the shooting. Wells had warned him that he wasn't welcome in Miami Beach, and he didn't want to spend the rest of the day being hassled by Peter Painter's officers.

It looked like he had reason to be edgy. The word he had put out had gotten to someone, that was for sure.

V

THE UNEASINESS STAYED WITH HIM, however, even though the shooting was over. He had run the two gunmen off who had made the attempt on his life, and he thought he had even wounded one of them. *But the prickling on the back of his neck was as strong as ever.*

Shayne visited several more bars, with the same lack of success that he had had in the others. The continuing failure to turn up anyone who knew something about the robbery surprised him. He had never known a criminal yet who could resist the temptation to brag to someone about the crimes he thought he had gotten away with.

The afternoon was slipping away when Shayne paused at a phone booth to check in with Lucy Hamilton again. He had talked to her several times during the afternoon, but there had been no calls at the office from anyone with information about the bank robbery. Shayne dialed the office number, and when Lucy answered, said, "It's me, Angel. Anything on that end yet?"

"Not a thing, Michael. Have you had any luck?"

"That depends on how you look at it. Somebody took a shot at me and missed."

There was a moment's pause on the other end, then Lucy said, "I'd say you've spooked someone, Michael. Are you all right?"

"Just fine. In fact, I think I winged one of the guys who tried to ambush me. But I haven't come up with anything on who pulled the robbery yet. They must have heard I was looking for them, though; otherwise they wouldn't have tried for me."

"Could it have been someone else?" Lucy asked.

"I suppose it could have been, but we're not working on anything

else at the moment. No, Angel, I think we've put a scare into the real robbers. Maybe next time they try for me, I'll nab them."

"You sound like you're looking forward to it."

Shayne's face creased in a grin as he lounged in the booth. "I am. They killed four people in that bank. And they tried to kill me. I'm looking forward to meeting them very much."

"Well, Michael, what are you going to —"

"Wait a minute, Angel!" Shayne cut in sharply. His fingers tightened around the phone. He had glanced over his shoulder out of habit, and his eyes had picked up a flicker of movement. Someone had ducked into a doorway down the street. Shayne's nerves were sending out warning signals.

Someone had been following him all day, he was sure of that, and it hadn't been just the gunmen who had ambushed him. There was somebody else interested in his movements, somebody who was damn good at tailing without being seen.

Whoever it was had made a slip-up now, though, allowing Shayne to catch a glimpse of him.

Shayne said quickly into the phone, "Have to run, Angel. I think I just stumbled onto something." He was hanging up before he could hear anymore than the beginnings of Lucy's admonition to be careful.

HE POPPED OUT OF THE BOOTH and started striding purposefully down the street, toward the doorway where he had seen the movement. It was about a block away, and Shayne was halfway there when the man in the doorway suddenly reappeared. He took one look at Shayne's grim, determined face, and then he did the smart thing.

He turned and ran.

Shayne had gotten a good enough look at the man to tell that he was middle-aged, with silvery hair and a thin frame. Despite his age, though, the man was moving pretty well as he ran down the sidewalk. Shayne broke into a run after him.

The man wheeled around a corner with Shayne pounding along behind him. They were drawing some curious stares from other pedestrians. Shayne had cut the gap between them down to about twenty feet. He was running easily, his long legs carrying him along at a much faster pace than the older man could maintain.

"Hold it!" Shayne yelled, hoping to slow his quarry down. The man glanced back over his shoulder, saw Shayne gaining on him, and seemed to draw on some reserve of strength to put on some extra speed.

Shayne considered drawing his gun and putting a warning shot over the man's head, but the street was too crowded to do that safely. It looked like he would have to run the man down.

That situation changed abruptly. The man stopped in his tracks, stood still for a moment, then staggered a few steps and grabbed a bus stop bench to keep from falling. Shayne slowed down. The man wouldn't be doing any more running for a while. Shayne could see his flushed face, the way his chest rose and fell rapidly. Any more exertion and the man would be courting a stroke or a heart attack.

Shayne grasped the man's arm. The man tried to jerk away. Shayne's grip held him easily. The big detective said, "Take it easy, mister. You don't look like this work agrees with you."

The man puffed frantically, trying to catch his breath. "I — I'm sorry — " he managed to gasp out. "I didn't mean you . . . any harm . . ."

Shayne thought the man certainly looked harmless enough. His face was lined; and he looked even older close up. His skin had a definite pallor about it, something that wasn't seen too often in Florida.

Shayne knew this was the man who had followed him, and now that he had seen him, he could understand why he hadn't been able to spot him earlier. The man was about as undistinguished-looking as he could get, with only his paleness to make him unusual. The area was full of middle-aged and elderly people, and Shayne realized with a start what good camouflage age could be.

"Listen," he said, "I'm not going to hurt you. But I do want to know why you fingered me for that set-up earlier. You talk and you won't get in as much trouble."

The man's breath had slowed some, and he was showing signs of recovery. He said, "I don't know . . . what you're talking about."

"The ambush," Shayne said. "You've been following me all day. You must have seen those two snipers take a shot at me."

"I saw it, yes, but I didn't have anything to do with it."

There was sincerity in the man's voice, but he could have been putting on an act. Shayne said, "You don't expect me to believe that, do you? Why else have you been following me, unless it was because you're tied in with the people who robbed that bank?"

"You are Mike Shayne, aren't you? The detective?"

"That's right." Shayne noticed that the man hadn't disclaimed any knowledge of the bank robbery, as he had expected him to do.

"The reason I've been following you is simple," the man said earnestly. "You don't like Harry Wells."

That wasn't the answer Shayne had thought he would hear. His

surprise and puzzlement must have shown on his face, because the man said, "Could we go somewhere and talk? I think we might possibly be able to do each other some good."

"All right," Shayne grunted. He let go of the man's arm and gestured down the street. "That little bar and grill all right with you?"

"That'll do just fine." The man seemed to have completely regained his composure, though he was still a little shaky as he fell into step behind Shayne.

WHEN THEY WERE SETTLED IN A BOOTH IN THE BAR, Shayne said, "Now, are you going to tell me what this is all about? Why don't you start with who you are?"

The man clasped long-fingered hands together on the table and said, "My name is Charles Foster, Mr. Shayne. I'm sure you don't know me."

"You're right, I've never seen you before."

"That's because I've spent the last twenty years in jail."

The statement didn't surprise Shayne. He had already figured that the one place a man wouldn't get tan in this state would be prison. "Why were you there?" he asked.

"I was convicted of murder. I was found guilty of . . . killing my wife." Foster's voice shook slightly, but Shayne could tell he was a man who was used to controlling what he was feeling. You had to be like that to survive in prison.

"There's more to it than that," Shayne said, lighting a cigarette. They had each bought a beer when they came in, but both mugs stood untouched on the table.

Foster leaned forward and spoke intently. "I was not guilty, Mr. Shayne. I didn't kill Agnes, I could never do anything like that. It must have been a burglar or some other intruder. But I didn't have an alibi, and the neighbors knew that Agnes and I had quarreled recently, so that was all the police needed. They must have wanted to make sure, though. Agnes . . . had been hit in the head. A tire iron with blood on it was found in my car. But it wasn't mine!"

"The light dawns," Shayne said. "The investigation was in the hands of a detective named Harry Wells, right?"

"That's right." A feral light came into Foster's eyes. "It was Harry Wells who found the tire iron there. He was the one who sent me to prison and ruined my life."

"You just got out?"

"A month ago. I came back here, and since then, I've been looking

up people who know Harry Wells. I don't think I'm the only one he's framed."

"That may be true," Shayne grunted. "But why were you tagging me?"

"I heard that you were investigating one of Wells' cases, that you were trying to prove he framed some boy for a bank robbery and killing. I wanted to know what you found out about the case. *Have* you found anything yet?"

"Maybe," Shayne said slowly. "You saw the attempt on my life earlier. I've been spreading the word that I'm after the real robbers. I think they were the ones who took the shots at me. I thought at first you were mixed up with them, Foster, but I'm starting to believe your story."

"It's the truth, Mr. Shayne. I don't know anything about any bank robbery or robbers. I'm . . . I'm not a criminal, even though I've been in prison. I was an honest man before I was framed, and I don't have any contacts with the criminal world in Miami."

"You do a good job of tailing a man."

Foster smiled thinly. "People tend not to notice me. It was an art I cultivated inside. The less you get noticed, the better off you are."

Shayne leaned back and rubbed his jaw. "I don't understand why you ran from me back there, though," he said. "From what you say, we're on the same side."

Foster nodded and said, "We are. But it all goes back to prison, Mr. Shayne. There's a fear that grows in you there. When I saw you coming after me, instinct took over. All I wanted to do was get away. It's fortunate, I suppose, that you caught up with me. I'd like . . . I'd like to help you if I can."

"You're interested in getting the goods on Wells, and I want to clear Ray Deegan's name. We're on the same team, all right."

"Ray Deegan is the young man Wells arrested for the robbery?"

"That's right," Shayne said. Quickly, he filled Charles Foster in on Deegan's situation. The older man nodded sympathetically. He knew how Deegan felt.

"You must have decided to believe my story," Foster said when Shayne was through, "or else you wouldn't have opened up to me this way."

"I think you're playing square with me," Shayne grunted. "I'll keep on thinking that until you give me reason to doubt you."

"I won't," Foster said softly. "I told you the truth. I want you to find the truth about Wells, Mr. Shayne. If you can expose the things he's done over the years, it would be the best thing in the world for me. I

don't think you realize how badly I want you to succeed."

There was a peculiar intensity in Foster's voice and eyes. Shayne said, "I think there's something else you're not telling me, Foster. What have you got in mind?"

"I made a vow," the silver-haired man said quietly. "I made it when I first went to prison, and my determination to keep it grew as the years passed. I'm going to see Wells exposed for what he is," and Foster's eyes locked with Shayne's, "or I'm going to see him dead. I'm going to kill him, Mr. Shayne."

VI

SHAYNE'S EYES NARROWED. HE REACHED UP and pulled on the lobe of his left ear without thinking about it. After a moment, he said, "You shouldn't say things like that here in Miami Beach, Foster. This is Wells' town. You'd never get away with it."

"I hope I don't have to. But I did make that vow, and I intend to keep it. You can stop it, though, by bringing the truth out into the open."

Shayne felt a surge of anger. "Wait just a damn minute," he said. "I'm going to do my best to nail Wells, but you're not going to put the responsibility for his life on my back. What you do is up to you, Foster, but I'm not to blame for it."

Foster sighed. "Be that as it may, but I told you how I feel about it. I've spent twenty years of my life in prison; it'll be worth it to spend the rest of it there to see Wells dead."

"What's to stop me from calling the cops and having you picked up for that threat?"

"Why, nothing, Mr. Shayne," Foster smiled. "If you want to call the police, you go right ahead. I couldn't very well hold it against you. After all, you are a licensed private detective, and I did threaten to commit a crime."

Shayne scowled at the older man for a long moment, then suddenly said, "Hell! You know I'm not going to turn you in, Foster. But I'll remember what you said, and if anything mysterious and deadly happens to Harry Wells, I'll come looking for you. I'll hunt you like I'd hunt any murderer."

"Fair enough," Foster allowed.

"There's another thing," Shayne said. "I don't want you following me anymore. I've got enough to watch out for without having you dogging me. Those bank robbers and killers are still out there somewhere, and they still want my blood. I don't want to worry about you."

"What do you suggest I do, then?"

"Have you got a good place to stay?"

Foster nodded. "I found a place in a rooming house. It's not very expensive, and I saved my wages while I was in prison. They're not much, but they add up over twenty years." Shayne could see the sudden idea that popped into Foster's head mirrored on his face. "I know! I could hire you to find out the truth about Wells. That would give us a professional relationship."

Shayne shook his red head. "I've already got a client. And I already told you, I'm not going to report that threat you made. You don't have to hire me, Foster, just stay out of my hair. I promise you, I'll get Wells if there's anything to get him for."

"Oh, he's guilty, all right. There's no doubt about that."

"Okay. Go back to the rooming house. I'll get on with my business, and you'll be one of the first to know if I find any evidence that Wells has been framing people. Deal?"

"Deal," Foster said, and he extended his hand over the table for Shayne to shake.

FOSTER LEFT THE BAR A FEW MINUTES LATER after giving Shayne his address and telephone number. Shayne promised again to get in touch with him as soon as he had something concrete on Wells.

After Foster had gone, Shayne lingered in the booth, smoking and thinking. His main interest in the case had been to clear the name of Ray Deegan. Now he was mixed up in some sort of vendetta against Harry Wells by the bitter ex-con, Foster. Harry Wells was no favorite of Shayne's, that was for sure, but Shayne didn't want Foster gunning for the lieutenant, either. For one thing, Shayne didn't know how long Foster would last if he had to go back to prison. The big redhead sighed. Foster's entrance into the case complicated things.

Shayne would have to deal with it, though. His original plan, to smoke out the real killers, was still the best one. He left the bar and headed back to his car. There were still places he could go, people he could see, in his search for the killers.

Now that Foster was off his tail, he could concentrate more on watching out for another ambush attempt. If another one came, he was determined that the attackers would not get away again.

Shayne suddenly remembered that he had been talking to Lucy on the phone when he spotted Foster. She was bound to be wondering what had happened to cause his abrupt departure from the phone. He glanced at his watch, saw that it wasn't quite five o'clock, and went back to the same booth, just down the street from the Buick. His blunt

finger punched out the digits of the office number, and Lucy answered on the first ring.

"Me again, Angel," he said. "I was afraid you might be worrying."

"You were right, Michael. Are you all right? Did you find out anything?"

"Yeah, to both questions. I'm fine, and it looks like Wells has been up to his tricks for a long time. And I may have to prove it to save his life."

He went on to tell her about the meeting with Charles Foster and the ex-con's promise to kill Wells if Shayne didn't find evidence of Wells' crooked activities. Lucy said, "That's just going to give you more to worry about, isn't it, Michael?"

"Looks like it. I'm sticking to the plan, though. I suppose no one's called there with any information about the robbery?"

"You suppose right."

Shayne nodded to himself. "Listen, Angel, it's almost time to close up shop for the day, and I don't want you hanging around there after quitting time."

"Are you saying that you're going to stop working on this case for the day exactly at five o'clock?"

"Well, no, but if you'll go back to your apartment, I'll pick you up about seven and take a break for dinner. How about it?"

"You've got yourself a deal, Michael."

"See you then, Angel," Shayne said, then hung up. Having dinner with Lucy might expose her to danger, at least to a certain extent, but he was confident that he could handle anything that came up. It was unlikely that the people who were after him would strike in a crowded restaurant anyway, not after all the opportunities he was going to give them between now and then. He was still in a rough part of town, and he intended to go on scouring it for a while longer.

SHAYNE VISITED SEVERAL MORE BARS, looking for someone who might know something about the robbery, and his luck, or lack of it, held. It was beginning to look as if no one in Miami or Miami Beach had heard any gossip about it. That was an unusual situation, as most major crimes were the subject of endless discussion on the fringes of the underworld. At first, Shayne had thought that the job must have been pulled by professionals, but doubt was beginning to set in. Was it possible that the robbery had been planned and carried out by amateurs?

That sounded unlikely to Shayne, but he had known stranger things

to happen. If that was the case, if people with no other criminal connections had pulled the bank job, then spreading the word along the grapevine stood little chance of doing any good.

Something floated around in the back of Shayne's head, and he had the uneasy feeling that there was a connection he was overlooking. Racking his brain turned up no answers, and he gave it up. Better not to think about it too much. Elusive answers sometimes popped up better on their own.

By the time dusk was slipping in over the Bay, Shayne was ready to call it a day. Lucy would be ready and waiting by the time he got cleaned up and went over to her apartment. For a while, all he wanted to concern himself with was a thick steak, a snifter of Martell, and the pleasure of Lucy Hamilton's company.

He got a good look at the red and gold sunset from the top of the causeway as he crossed the Bay, heading back to Miami. It was a beautiful sight, and while it gave him pause to appreciate it, it also made him think that there were so such sights to be viewed from Ray Deegan's cell. He resolved to give the elder Deegan a call and reassure him that the case was going as well as could be expected, even though it wasn't.

Some of the cars in the early evening traffic were starting to turn their lights on. Shayne flicked his on, then noticed a car coming up behind him without any lights. He watched it in the rearview mirror as it drew closer. It was a dark color, and without lights it was hard to see in the twilight. Shayne knew it was behind him, though; he could see the bulk of it in the gloom.

He turned off Biscayne Boulevard onto Second Avenue. His apartment building was only a few blocks away now, and he was concentrating on that, rather than on the car behind him. But it made the turn, too, and Shayne found himself frowning. A tiny alarm was going off in his head.

HE WAS REACHING UNDER HIS COAT TO LOOSEN HIS GUN in its holster when the car behind him put on a sudden burst of speed. Its front bumper slammed into the Buick's rear one, and Shayne's head was jerked backwards. He felt a twinge of pain in his neck, but then there was no time to worry about it. The other car was pulling out and surging up beside him.

There were no other cars within a couple of blocks. Shayne knew this was another ambush. He wrenched at the wheel of the Buick as the other car veered toward him.

Metal ground together and shrieked in protest as the two cars came

together. Shayne fought the wheel desperately with one hand while snatching his gun out with the other. The dark car swung away from him, then back. There was another grinding collision.

The Buick was being forced steadily toward the curb. Well, Shayne reasoned, if that's where they wanted him to go . . .

He jerked the wheel to the right, sending the Buick up onto the sidewalk with a jarring bump. Shayne tried to keep it on a relatively straight course with his left hand while aiming across his body with the gun in his right hand. He squeezed off a shot.

The bullet hit the fender of the other car and screamed off at an angle as Shayne's Buick hit a mailbox on the sidewalk and sent it spinning away crazily. The closest pedestrians were half a block away, and they were running for cover, away from the careening Buick. Shayne hit a potted palm in front of a hotel and scattered dirt and palm fronds along the sidewalk.

He was trying for another shot at his pursuers, but before he could get one off, he saw muzzle flashes coming from the other car. Bullets thudded into the body of the car.

There was an alley up ahead, and Shayne knew that if he could reach it, he might have a chance to get away or even turn the tables on his attackers. His foot pressed down on the accelerator and his fingers gripped the madly jumping wheel.

His hopes exploded with the left rear tire. One of the shots fired at him had found a vulnerable target. The rear end of the car slewed to the side, and the steering wheel tore itself out of Shayne's hands. He lost his gun in the battle to keep the Buick under control.

The front end clipped a light pole, jarring Shayne. He grabbed at the wheel again, but the effort came too late. The car was going too fast to bring it back under control now.

Shayne felt it starting to tip over, and he let go of the wheel. Ducking down and to the side, he tried to protect his head as the car went over . . .

It rolled, smashing a litter barrel and another mailbox before slamming into the side of a building. Shayne was thrown around wildly. His head cracked into the roof of the car and sent skyrockets shooting through his brain.

The Buick came to a stop on its side, tilting and wobbling. Shayne found himself on his back, lying at the bottom with his feet above him. There was broken glass all around him, and tiny cuts covered his hands and face. He ignored the stinging pain of them and struggled to reach up to the ignition key. The motor was still running, and he had to get it shut off in case of a fuel leak . . . If the gasoline was spilled, one spark

could turn the car into an inferno . . .

Shayne wasn't aware of the distant screams or the running footsteps pounding closer to him. His reaching fingers found the key and snapped it to the side, killing the engine. Twisting himself around like a contortionist, Shayne tried to get his feet under him so that he could climb out through the broken side window above him.

A face appeared in the window before Shayne could get there. It was too dark outside to make out any of its features, but Shayne saw it looming. The head turned, and Shayne heard the man it belonged to call, "He's still alive! Come on!"

A flame of anger burned in Shayne. This was one of the men who had caused the wreck. He lunged upward, his fingers clawing for that unseen face.

A hand reached into the wreckage of the car. Shayne saw it coming at his face, and he tried to check his lunge. His nerves and muscles were too slow to respond, though.

The gun in the hand slapped against Shayne's temple, and on top of the earlier blow, it was just too much. Not even the big redhead's iron constitution could cope with that.

He went out fast, and he went out deep and dark.

VII

WHEN HE CAME BACK, HE HAD NO IDEA HOW LONG he had been unconscious or where he was. The first thing he knew was the song of crickets, chirping merrily. Then the darkness began to fade, until he was vaguely aware of lights penetrating his closed eyelids.

Shayne resisted the impulse to shake his head. Clearing the cobwebs could wait until he had a better idea of where he was. He was uncomfortable, he knew that much. His arms were jerked behind him and bound with rope. He realized that he was tied into a chair, his feet lashed to the legs of it.

He was trying to keep his breathing deep and even, as it had probably been while he was unconscious. Wherever he was, it was hot and humid, and he heard mosquitoes whining around his ears.

A man suddenly spoke, taking Shayne by surprise. "How long is he going to be out? Hell, he's not dead, is he?"

"We'd better hope not," a second voice answered. "We weren't supposed to kill him, you know that. Why in the hell you ever started shooting at him, I don't know."

"I didn't want him to get away. I never expected him to go up on the sidewalk like that and start shooting at us."

"You expected him to go along nice and easy, huh? You don't know Mike Shayne."

"Just get off my back, okay? He's alive, isn't he?"

"Maybe you better check on that."

Shayne heard the scrape of a chair, then footsteps approached him. Fingers grasped his chin and tilted his head back roughly. He kept his eyes closed, but he let a groan escape from his lips. The groan was real; the abrupt motion had made his head feel like exploding.

"I think he's coming around," the man said excitedly. "Give me some water."

Shayne knew what to expect, but the sudden splash of cold water in his face was still a shock. There was no point in feigning unconsciousness now, so he sputtered and shook his head, blinking the water out of his eyes.

At first, he thought something was wrong with his sight when he saw the distorted face peering at him. Then he realized that the man was wearing a stocking over his head. The man straightened up, and Shayne could see that he was in a cabin of some sort, with a dirt floor and plank walls. The place was rundown, and bare of furniture except for three chairs. He was tied into one of them, and the other two were for his captors.

The second man joined the first to stand in front of Shayne. He wore a stocking mask, too, and both of them were dressed in undistinguished work clothes. Shayne looked up at them blearily.

"All right, Shayne," the first man said. "Welcome back to the land of the living. Enjoy your nap?"

There was no gag in Shayne's mouth. That meant they were somewhere out in the country, where there was no one around to hear any outcry. He said hoarsely, "Who are you? What the hell is going on?"

The second one said, "It's time for school, Shayne. You're going to learn a lesson."

"Yeah," the first one said. "You're in for a study session. What did they used to call it? A skull-buster?"

His fist whipped toward Shayne's head. Shayne saw the blow coming and tried to jerk his head out of the way, but everything he had been through so far had slowed his reflexes down. The fist cracked into the side of his head.

The room spun crazily before Shayne's eyes. Pain shot down his neck from his head and washed all the way through him. But he didn't black out again. He held onto consciousness desperately, and the spinning room settled down in a few seconds.

Shayne moved his shoulders, trying to ease the pain. The second

man stepped closer and grated, "That's just the start of it, Shayne. We've got lots more to teach you. We don't want to go too fast, though. We don't want you to get behind."

They didn't want him passing out again, he thought. They wanted him awake so that he could feel everything they did to him.

THEY WAITED UNTIL HIS BREATHING HAD SUBSIDED a little bit, then stepped in and hit him again. This time they went for the body, smashing blows to his ribs and stomach. Shayne gasped with the pain, but he kept from crying out.

"You're a brave one. Or maybe you're just stupid. You'd better hope not, Shayne, for your own sake. If you don't learn your lesson, you might not live through the studying."

The few moments earlier when he had made them think he was still out came in handy now. He knew from what he had overheard that they weren't supposed to kill him. Any threats to kill him would be just that, threats.

Accidents did happen, though, and if they got carried away with what they were doing . . .

Shayne let himself moan when they hit him again. One of them smashed him in the mouth, and he felt blood trickling down his chin. He asked in a choked voice, "What . . . what is it you want?"

"We want you to be smart, Shayne. You know what smart boys do?" The man punctuated the question with a hard open-handed slap.

"Wh-what?"

"They don't poke their noses into things that don't concern them. You understand?"

Shayne tried to nod and couldn't make his head work right. The man slapped him again, and then the other one hit him in the chest. The breath went out of him, and for a terrible moment, he gasped for air, feeling the blood pounding in his head.

It went on for what seemed like hours, but logically, Shayne knew it was only a half hour or so. They would hit him, then make snide comments and ask him if he had learned his lesson, and then they would hit him again, no matter what he said.

There was nothing he could do but take it. He had hoped they might say something to reveal who they were, but so far they hadn't. He was sure it had something to do with the Deegan business, but who they were and how they tied in, he didn't know.

Finally, after one of them had given him a particularly vicious punch in the head, he let his eyes slip closed and his head fell limply forward. He had to have a break, or he really would pass out.

One of the men snorted disgustedly. "The great Mike Shayne!" he said. "He gave out easier than I thought he would. I guess all those stories about him were just stories."

"Get some water again."

Shayne heard one of them step out through the shack's door, and then there was the sound of water running. The faucet had to be right outside the door. The man stepped back in.

This time Shayne was ready. The water hit him in the face, but he didn't flinch. Fingers tangled in his red hair and jerked his head up, but he kept his eyes closed and his head limp. The man let him go, and Shayne let his head drop again.

"He's really out," the man said to his partner. "You think he's had enough?"

"I don't know. I want to hear him say he's going to lay off about Deegan."

There, Shayne thought. There was the proof of what he had suspected. All this stemmed from his investigation into the Ray Deegan case. But he still didn't know who the men were.

He couldn't take much more punishment, though, he knew that. If they gave him a chance, he would have to take it. Getting away from them was what was important now. If they were connected with the Deegan case, then he would cross their paths again, and the score could be settled then.

If he was beaten much more, he wouldn't be any good to anybody for a long time. He was sure of that. A precious few seconds of rest passed while the two men discussed what to do with him next.

One of them said, "We'd better give him some more. We want to be sure he understands he's got to drop that case. You agree?"

"Sure. We'd better lay off his head, though. We don't want to fracture his skull."

Such concern, Shayne thought grimly to himself. His head was still hanging limply.

"Get him loose from the chair and put him on the floor while he's still out. It's been too long since I did any good old-fashioned stomping."

SHAYNE KEPT HIS FACE EXPRESSIONLESS. He had hoped that they would cut him loose sooner or later if he kept pretending to be out cold. Some of the strength had come back into his rangy body, and while his head was still spinning and pounding, he was ready to at least give making a break a try.

He felt the ropes on his legs being cut loose, but he kept still. Then

the man was at his back, slashing the cords that held him to the chair. He started to sag forward loosely as the man stepped back around in front of him.

And then Shayne's eyes were open and he was throwing himself out of the chair in a dive. His head hit the man in the stomach and knocked him backwards. Shayne followed right after him, throwing rapid punches to the man's body. The man let out a yell.

Shayne grabbed at the man's hand and brought the wrist down sharply on his knee. The knife in the man's hand clattered to the floor.

There were footsteps rushing toward Shayne from the other direction. He let himself slip under a punch, then dove for the fallen knife. The fact that his eyes were acting up and he saw two of the knife didn't bother him. He grabbed both of them, since he seemed to have three hands.

He rolled on the dirt floor, slashing upwards with the knife. The man reaching for him jerked back, a long rip across the front of his shirt. Blood started to well from the deep cut.

Shayne's vision blurred again, then sharpened abruptly. Adrenalin was surging through him, clearing his head. And his instincts weren't letting him down. He rolled to the side, kicking out and catching the knee of the other man. Shayne surged to his feet and found himself at the open door.

He didn't hesitate. So far, he had carried the fight because of the element of surprise. That was gone now, and there was no way he had the stamina for a lengthy battle. He lunged through the door into the darkness outside.

There was enough moonlight for him to see that trees surrounded the shack. He plunged into them, heedless of where he was going, wanting only to get away from the shack and his two captors.

He slowed down a moment later as the shadows swallowed him up. Now that he had escaped from the shack, there was no sense in bashing his brains out on a tree trunk. He could hear the men thrashing through the brush after him, but he had a lead on them, at least for the moment.

Shayne came to a stop next to a tree. He leaned on it, thankful for the support of its narrow trunk. He brought his breathing under control as quickly as he could. The harsh panting could draw his pursuers.

He heard them making their way through the trees, but they were several yards away. The beam of a flashlight flicked on, probing through the shadows under the trees.

Shayne slid down lower and stayed where he was. The flashlight beam went over him, and he held his breath. The two men moved on,

cursing, each of them blaming the other one for letting Shayne get away.

"How the hell was I supposed to know he was faking?"

"Well, how was I? And it wasn't me who let him get the knife. The bastard cut me! He won't get away with that."

They went on past him, and Shayne waited until they were a couple of hundred yards away from the shack. He could still hear them faintly and could see the beam from the flashlight as they searched. He stood up and headed back to the shack as quietly as he could.

When he reached the little clearing, the light coming through the open door of the shack showed him what he hadn't had time to see earlier. Their car, the one that had tried to run him off the road back in Miami, was parked at the side of the ramshackle building. Shayne hurried over to it.

A quick check inside told him that the keys weren't in it. He looked the car over rapidly, then checked the interior of the shack. His gun was nowhere to be found. He had been hoping that the two men would have brought it with them when they had pulled him from the wreck of the Buick.

As quietly as he could, Shayne raised the hood of the car. Finding the distributor cap, he ripped all the wires going to the spark plugs. They wouldn't be chasing him in this car.

A NARROW DIRT ROAD LED OUT OF THE CLEARING on the other side of the shack. Shayne headed for it and broke into a run. He wanted to put as much distance as possible between himself and the shack before the men returned there.

He was ignoring the pain coursing through him. If he gave in to it, he might not be able to keep running.

Shayne glanced up every now and then, studying the stars for a second, trying to get some idea of where he was. He knew he had to be somewhere in the country west of Miami, an area that had vast undeveloped stretches. Night had fallen completely by now. Shayne's watch had been broken sometime during the commotion, so he had no idea exactly what time it was.

So far there had been no sign of pursuit behind him. The men would have to come after him on foot, and he hoped that he could build up a good lead before they started down the road after him.

A new sound suddenly came to his ears over the harsh noise of his own breathing. It was a deep, low rumble, and Shayne recognized it.

It was the sound of trucks. A highway had to be nearby.

The road curved, and he saw lights ahead. He estimated that he had run about a mile so far, and the lights flickering by up ahead were at least half a mile away. He took a deep breath and picked up his pace.

Shayne knew that he must look pretty gruesome after the beating he had endured, but surely someone would stop for him. He pounded up to the highway a few minutes later and stopped on the shoulder of the road, weaving and swaying. Headlights were approaching from down the highway, and Shayne stepped onto the asphalt, raising his arm. He could tell from the height of the lights and the roar of the engine that it was a big semi barreling toward him.

He didn't see it come to a screaming halt, though. His strength suddenly deserted him, and he slumped to the ground. He was out cold before he hit it.

VIII

"THIS IS THE ADDRESS YOU GAVE ME, ISN'T IT, MR. SHAYNE?"

"That's right, Roy. You can let me out anywhere along here."

"You sure you'll be okay now?"

"Yeah, I think I can make it. Thanks again. You sure I can't —"

The young truck driver waved a big hand. "Aw, shoot, no. I'm just glad I could help a famous detective like you."

Shayne knew very well that he might owe his life to Roy Bristow. The trucker had stopped, picked him up off the side of the road, and carried him into the cab, no easy task considering Shayne's bulk. He had washed the blood off, bandaged the wounds as best he could with his first-aid kit, and then when Shayne had come to, provided a jolt of fine, well-aged Scotch. Shayne wasn't normally a Scotch-drinker, but right now it came in very handy.

They had been about fifteen miles outside of Miami, and Roy had headed straight for Shayne's apartment. The load of furniture in the back of the truck could wait, he said.

Now Shayne hopped down out of the cab and gave Bristow a grin and a wave as the trucker pulled back out into the street. He turned and walked slowly into the apartment building. The night man behind the desk opened his sleepy eyes wider and said, "My gosh, Mr. Shayne, what happened to you? Can I get you a doctor?"

"No, thanks," Shayne said. "I think I'll live, especially if I can soak in a hot tub for a while. Don't let anybody disturb me, okay?"

"Sure thing, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne saw from the clock on the wall of his apartment that it was

only a little after nine o'clock. It seemed like it should be later, but that was only because he had been unconscious twice. When he had a chance, he would need to have a doctor check him out, but for now he had other things to do.

As soon as he got that hot bath and a big tumbler of Martell.

He poured the cognac and started sipping it as he stripped off his clothes. Running the bath water as hot as he could stand it, he then sank down into it slowly, letting the heat ease the aches and pains that dotted his body.

His muscles gradually relaxed and unkinked themselves, and at the same time, his mind worked out the kinks in it, too. He had a lot to think about.

He had tried to draw out the real bank robbers, and he was convinced that he had done that. The men who had shot at him earlier in the day had meant to kill him, he was sure of that. But the ones who had run him off the road and then beaten him had been told by someone else not to kill him. All they were really after was scaring him off the Deegan case, and the close brushes with death had been accidents. That meant they had been sent by someone else besides the people who had pulled the bank job.

The bank job . . . That was something else again. He had been able to turn up absolutely nothing concerning the real identities of the robbers, despite his probing among his contacts. That was unusual, and it reinforced the thought that maybe the job had been pulled off by amateurs, people without underworld connections.

But if that was the case, then how had the word gotten to them, so that they knew Shayne was a threat to them?

Shayne sat up in the bath suddenly. There was a possibility he hadn't considered. Eyes narrowing in thought, he reached out and plucked a cigarette from the pack he had laid next to the tub. When he had it going, he leaned back again and ran through the idea in his mind.

The idea turned into a theory, and the more Shayne considered it, the more sense it seemed to make. He *had* told someone else that he was going to go after the real robbers in order to clear Ray Deegan's name. He had told Ron Walcott, Craig Burgess, and Monty Spann . . .

SHAYNE LEFT HIS APARTMENT TEN MINUTES LATER, dressed in fresh clothes and feeling much better than when he had arrived. The hot water and the cognac had done wonders, but catching a glimpse of what might turn out to be the truth had helped even more.

He was on the sidewalk, looking for a cab, when a car suddenly

pulled up at the curb. A beefy, thick-bodied man jumped from it, moving with a speed that belied his size. He bellowed, "Mike! God-damn it, where have you been, man?"

Shayne grinned, wincing at the twinge of pain from the bruises on his face. "Take it easy, Will. I'm okay. I guess you must have found my car."

Will Gentry, the chief of Miami's police force, took a cigar from his pocket and jammed it unlit into his mouth. "Damn right we found your car, wrecked on the sidewalk and you nowhere to be found. Neither Lucy or Tim knew where you were, and Lucy's worried sick about you. They told me about the case you're working on. We all thought your dumb Irish luck might have run out."

"Not yet," Shayne grunted. "Did your boys bring my car in?"

"Yeah, it's down at the garage. It's going to take some work, but I don't think you managed to total it this time. Now, how about telling me just what happened?"

Shayne spotted a cab cruising down the street. He raised a hand to signal it. "I'd like to, Will, but I've got a lead I want to check out. How about calling Lucy and Tim for me and telling them I'm all right?"

"Wait just a —" Gentry sputtered. The cab pulled up at the curb. Shayne opened the rear door and hopped in. "Dammit, Mike," Gentry went on, "you can't just —"

"See you later, Will. I'll tell you all about it then."

The cab pulled away, leaving Gentry even more flord-faced than usual.

Shayne's notebook had been left in his pocket when he was captured earlier, and he had transferred it to his clean shirt. He took it out now and found the place where he had jotted down the name of the grocery store where the three young men worked. The taxi driver knew where the all-night store was located, and he pointed the cab in that direction.

Shayne knew that his theory was a little far-fetched, but if it was true, then it would answer a lot of the questions. There was something about it he didn't like, though. Someone he liked was going to get hurt.

The driver crossed the Bay a few minutes later, and Shayne saw the sparkling lights of Miami Beach spread out before him. It was a pretty sight, but after all he had been through on this day, he was in no mood to appreciate it.

And the night was still a long way from over.

WHEN THE CAB PULLED UP IN FRONT of the grocery store, Shayne saw that the parking lot was mostly empty. There were several cars on

the lot, but they were clustered near the glass entrance doors of the store.

Those doors swung open automatically when Shayne approached them, and a buzzer went off for a few seconds inside. It was after ten o'clock now, and that was to let the employees know that someone had entered the store. Standard procedure in all-night stores, Shayne knew.

Vapid music oozed from speakers in the ceiling. Shayne looked past the row of check stands into the store and saw a few scattered shoppers pushing carts up and down the aisles. He was glad that there weren't very many of them. A crowded store wouldn't serve his purpose nearly as well.

A bored-looking young woman was standing at one of the check stands, and Shayne asked her, "Where would I find Ron Walcott, Craig Burgess, and Monty Spann?"

The girl lifted her eyebrows. Evidently such a question was a little less common than asking where the green beans were. She said, "I think I saw them over on Aisle 12. They were stocking a new shipment of pet food."

Shayne said, "Thanks," stepped around an empty cart that someone had left there, and headed for aisle 12.

He turned a corner and found the aisle empty except for the three young men he was looking for. They were unloading cans and bags of pet food from a big-wheeled hand truck.

Walcott saw Shayne first. He was kneeling down at the bottom shelf, but he stood up, grinned, and said, "Hi, Mr. Shayne. What are you doing here?"

Burgess and Spann also greeted him, rather brusquely. All three of the young men wore white aprons over their clothes. Burgess seemed to be moving rather stiffly as he unloaded cartons of cans.

Shayne nodded in return to their greetings and said, "I just thought I'd stop by and try out an idea on you. Something occurred to me that I hadn't thought of before."

"Something that'll help Ray?"

"Something about his alibi. It occurred to me that while you three were trying to give him an alibi, you were giving yourselves one, too."

"Us?" Walcott asked. "What would we need with an alibi?"

"If Deegan was mixed up in that robbery, then some other people were in on it with him. Witnesses saw three robbers in the bank. You can figure they had a driver waiting outside, even though no one spotted the getaway car. Four men total . . . like Athos, Porthos, Aramis, and D'Artagnan."

The smile dropped off of Walcott's face. "What are you trying to say, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne was equally as grim now. "I was assuming Ray Deegan's innocence before," he said. "I liked his father, and I wanted to think he wasn't guilty, that he was being framed. So I didn't wonder about the three of you. But now I am. Somebody took some shots at me this afternoon, not too awful long after I talked to you."

"Dammit!" Spann cut in. "That doesn't mean anything. Are you saying we tried to kill you? Why the hell would we?"

"To keep me from digging further into Deegan's case. You were afraid I might find out that he was guilty after all, and then I'd start thinking about who was in on the job with him. You three."

Walcott laughed, but it was a forced sound. "That's crazy, Mr. Shayne. Wouldn't the cops be after us if they thought we had anything to do with the robbery?"

"They've probably thought about it. But if they don't have any evidence, and Deegan doesn't break down and implicate you under questioning . . ."

"Lack of evidence wouldn't stop that Lieutenant Wells. He'd provide his own."

"One frame might stick. Not four. No, Deegan slipped up somewhere; somebody got wise that he had something to do with the robbery and tipped off Wells. And the three of you were content to let him take the rap, as long as he didn't spill it about the rest of you. You didn't want a private detective digging around in the case."

Walcott shook his head. "What a wild story. How are you going to prove any of it?"

Shayne said slowly, "I think I wounded one of the people who tried to kill me this afternoon. Burgess!" Shayne's voice cracked like a whip. Burgess had said nothing so far, and he looked the most nervous of the three. His pale face jerked around. "Why don't you take off your shirt, Burgess?" Shayne went on. "Let's see if you're moving so stiffly because it was you that I winged. I've seen enough bullet wounds to know one when I see one."

Burgess's breath was coming quickly now. He stammered, "N-no, I'm not going to do it. You can't just come in here and do —"

Shayne stepped toward him, his face hard and grim. "The hell I can't. Now get that shirt off!"

There was a bag of cat food in Burgess's hands, and as Shayne stepped closer to him, his nerve suddenly broke. With an inarticulate yell, he hurled the bag at Shayne's head.

Shayne threw his hands up, and the bag slammed into his arms. The

impact split it, and tiny pellets shaped like fish showered around the big detective. He lunged for Burgess, but one of his feet slipped on the scattered cat food.

Walcott slammed into him at the same time, and Shayne found himself falling. He hit the linoleum floor hard, with Walcott on top of him, pounding him with his long arms. Spann launched a kick at him. Shayne twisted, and Spann's foot caught Walcott instead.

Walcott grunted, and Shayne got one arm loose long enough to strike upwards with a short, fierce blow. It caught Walcott on the chin and snapped his head back. Shayne shoved him away and came to his feet as Spann threw a roundhouse right at him. Shayne ducked under it, stepped closer to Spann, and exploded two solid punches to the belly. Spann gasped and folded up.

Burgess was running away down the aisle. Shayne slipped the spare gun that he had tucked into his pants out, cracked it lightly against the head of Walcott as the young man struggled to get up, then called after the fleeing Burgess, "Hold it, kid!" Burgess didn't stop, and Shayne triggered off a shot over his head. That set off screams and yells from the other people in the store, but Burgess stopped like he had run into a wall and threw up his hands.

Shayne looked around him. Walcott was out cold on the floor, Spann had fallen into a stack of cans and tumbled them around him, and Burgess was making like a statue. Shayne shook his head and muttered to himself, "What a bunch of desperadoes . . ."

Still, they had managed to kill four people and had nearly done him in, not to mention the loot they had taken out of the bank. All in all, rounding them up wasn't such a bad day's work.

It wasn't over yet, though. Even as he looked at the three young hold-up men, he knew that one thing remained to be cleared up.

It was time for another meeting with Harry Wells.

IX

IT WAS A FEW MINUTES AFTER MIDNIGHT when Shayne got out of another cab across the street from Miami Beach police headquarters. He had called from a pay phone at the grocery store after squaring things away there and found out that Harry Wells and Jed Cotten were on duty until midnight.

There was a small park across the street from the building, with palm trees growing close to the sidewalk. Shayne waited in the shadow of one of them, resisting the impulse to light a cigarette. For now, he

wanted to stay out of sight. Wells should be leaving the station soon, and odds were he would come out the door across the street.

Shayne had been standing there for about five minutes when his supposition came true. He saw the familiar figure of Wells, in hat and topcoat, come through the door with Jed Cotten flanking him.

Shayne hoped that Cotten would go on, so that he could face Wells alone, but the pudgy man showed no sign of leaving Wells' side. Shayne was about to step out of the shadows and cross the street when another car suddenly pulled up at the curb.

Two men got out and headed toward Wells. Shayne stayed where he was and watched. One of the men called, "Hey, Harry. Wait a minute."

Shayne recognized the voice. This was an unexpected bonus.

It was quiet on the street, and the park at his back was deserted at this time of night. Shayne stood quietly, straining his ears to hear what was being said across the street.

The two men had confronted Wells now, and the other one said, "Sorry, Harry, but it didn't work out. We tried, but —"

"Never mind," Wells cut him off sharply. "You can tell me about it later."

Cotten said something to Wells, but it was so low that Shayne couldn't make it out. Wells shook his head and laughed. Shayne heard him say, "Nothing for you to worry about, Jed." He turned back to the two men. "I guess you and Jack better get on inside, Phil. You've already missed roll call for the midnight shift."

So the two men were cops, too, Shayne mused. That made sense. It figured Wells would use other cops to help him out — other cops who thought like he did.

Shayne would be able to find out who the two of them were later. Settling the score for what they had done to him in the little shack could wait a little longer. Pressing charges against them might not be as cathartic as getting them alone in a locked room for a while, but it would do.

The two men went on into the building, and Wells and Cotten started down the sidewalk. Now was the time, Shayne decided.

HE STEPPED OUT OF THE SHADOWS and strode across the street. Wells and Cotten saw him coming and stopped.

"Well, Shayne," Wells said sourly, "what are you doing over here at this time of night? I thought I told you to stay out of Miami Beach."

"I had business over here," Shayne said tightly. "Business with you."

Wells looked disgusted and turned to Cotten. "You might as well go on, Jed. Shayne just wants to mouth off, and there's no reason we both have to listen to his drivel."

"I don't mind, Harry — " Cotten began.

"No, you go on." Wells patted Cotten on the shoulder. "See you in the morning."

Shayne started to say, "He can stay if he wants — "

Wells stepped closer to Shayne and put out a hand, grasping Shayne's arm. "I'd rather talk in private, if you don't mind. This is just between the two of us."

Shayne opened his mouth, and then he felt the gun digging into his side. It was in the pocket of Wells' topcoat, the pocket that Wells' other hand was in.

Cotten shrugged. "If you're sure, Harry. See you tomorrow." Cotten turned to Shayne. "If you're smart, Shayne, you'll listen to Harry. He's the best damn detective I ever saw, and you should stop harassing him."

Wells' eyes told Shayne to keep quiet.

Cotten started walking down the street, and Wells said in normal tones, "Let's go over to the park, Shayne. You can get whatever's bothering you out of your system."

Wells steered Shayne back across the street, keeping up the pressure on the gun. Shayne thought about making a move, but he would probably catch at least one slug. And Wells was known to be a good shot.

"There's something I want to tell you," Shayne said as they entered the darkened park.

"Nothing you could say is going to interest me, you bastard," Wells hissed. "We never crossed paths before, Shayne, and you should have kept it that way. I'm only a few months away from retirement, and I'm not going to let some lousy peeper screw that up for me."

"You screwed it up for yourself," Shayne returned. "You weren't satisfied with the tip you had about Deegan. You had to make sure by planting some evidence."

"And I did a good job of it, too, didn't I?" Wells chuckled.

"You've had enough practice over the years, from what I've heard," Shayne said.

"That's far enough." They were a hundred yards or so into the park, in deep shadow. Shayne couldn't see Wells' face, but he could hear the intensity in his voice. "I only did what I had to do, Shayne, and I'll be damned if you're going to make me feel guilty about it. When I started out in this job, the courts let a cop do what he had to do to make

sure we got the job done. But now they just keep tying our hands more and more. I never planted evidence unless it was necessary to get a conviction."

"What if the suspect you planted it on was innocent?"

Wells snorted. "I know the innocent from the guilty. Always have. I can smell a criminal, Shayne. They don't teach that at the academy."

Shayne was gazing at Wells' dark figure. He saw a flicker of something over the police detective's shoulder, but it was only there for a second and then gone. The light from the street didn't reach this far, and while Shayne could make out Wells' bulk in the shadows, he couldn't see any details. He knew the gun was still there, though, even if Wells wasn't poking it into his side anymore.

"Why did you send those two men after me?" he asked. "What was the need, if you were so sure that Ray Deegan was guilty?"

"I couldn't take any chances with you, you know that. You're just the type to get all high and mighty and go running to the newspapers with some story about the awful, crooked, corrupt Harry Wells. I'm not going to stand for that, Shayne. I'm sure that reporter friend of yours would love to write about how I planted the evidence in Deegan's apartment."

"It is the truth, though."

"Be damned to that kind of truth! What does it matter how you convict a no-good murderer, as long as you convict him? Ray Deegan's not worth two drops of a good man's sweat."

SHAYNE HAD TO KEEP HIM TALKING. He had seen the flicker again. Someone was coming into the park, moving in and out of the shadows. Shayne had to keep Wells tooting his own horn, so that he wouldn't hear the approaching footsteps.

"So you sent a couple of cops after me to scare me off the case. The two of them probably hero-worship you. If only they knew."

"No cops like some gumshoe bothering one of their own. The boys were glad to do it for me."

"It didn't work, though. They nearly killed me when they grabbed me, and then I got away from them out in the country. I guess they just managed to get back to town. They wanted you to know that I was still on the loose and out to find the truth about the Deegan case."

"I found the truth already."

"But you admit you planted the gun and those other things in Deegan's apartment, and that you sent those two cops after me to rough me up?"

"Hell, yes, I thought I'd already admitted it! Everything you say is

true, Shayne, but you just can't seem to understand the reasons for it. I'm a cop. I have to do my job, even if the court and the press don't like the way I do it."

Shayne took a deep breath. "Now that you've told me all about it, what are you going to do? You know I won't keep quiet about it."

"Now that is a damn shame," Wells said. "You've cracked a few cases yourself. But like I said, I'm getting close to retirement, and you're not going to ruin it for me. No, Shayne, I'm afraid you're about to be the victim of a fatal mugging." Wells paused. "I'm sure I can make it look convincing."

Shayne saw Wells move in the shadows. Wells thrust the gun forward, jamming it against Shayne's body. That would muffle the blast, and this late at night, it probably wouldn't even be heard.

Shayne threw himself to the side. The gun went off, the explosion mingling with a shouted. "No!" A fiery finger raked along Shayne's side. He struck out at the shadows, felt his fist connect with Wells' jaw.

Wells' gun went off again, and this time the slug caught Shayne in the leg, ripping through the fleshy part of his thigh. The force of it spun him around, sending him to the stone path they were on. He kicked out with his good leg and missed.

A light flicked on, partially blinding Shayne. He could see Wells standing above him, the gun in his hand, looking back at the light.

Jed Cotten's voice ripped out. "Drop the gun, Harry!" Shayne could hear the emotion tearing out along with the words. "Please, Harry."

Wells' face twisted in a macabre grin. "It's a damn good thing you showed up when you did, Jed. This lousy shamus tried to kill me. I think he's gone crazy."

"No." Cotten's voice was flat when it came back. "He's not the one that's crazy. I think I am. I must have been to have believed in you all these years."

Wells forced a laugh as Shayne gripped his wounded leg, fighting the pain. "What are you talking about, Jed? Come on, help me with Shayne here. I had to wound him."

"Forget it, Harry. I heard what you said to him, about how you planted evidence and tried to have him hurt. I heard you tell him you were going to kill him. Put the gun down, Harry. I've got to arrest you."

"Jed . . . After all these years?"

"Goddamn it!" Cotten sounded like he was about to crack. "Drop the gun, I said! You're under arrest!"

"Oh, no," Wells said softly, and Shayne saw the rage and madness

on his face. "No one's going to arrest me. I'm a cop."

And then he swung the gun away from Shayne, bringing it up and around and aiming it at the light, and Cotten stood there, his own gun out . . .

And Shayne knew he wouldn't fire it in time. He couldn't.

Shayne came to his knees and launched himself at Wells, grabbing his legs and throwing him off-balance. Wells fired, but the gun was tilted up, and the bullet screamed toward the stars. Shayne heard another gun blast, and Wells grunted suddenly, falling.

Shayne let him go as Cotten came running up. Shayne's move have given the policeman's instincts time to take over. He had fired in response to Wells firing on him, but his bullet had hit home. There was a bloody patch on Wells' topcoat near the shoulder, and his right arm hung limply.

Wells moaned in pain, his eyes closed, but Shayne could tell that the wound wasn't fatal. Cotten knelt beside his partner and said softly, "Dammit, Harry, you were a good cop. You didn't need to do what you did."

SHAYNE SAT DOWN IN THE PATH, SUDDENLY TOO WEARY and awash with pain to stay on his feet any longer. "You're probably right," he said to Cotten. "Wells could have been one of the best. I think he really did have an instinct for sniffing out criminals." Shayne paused. "He sniffed out Ray Deegan."

Cotten shot a glance at Shayne. "What do you mean?" he said sharply.

"I mean Ray Deegan is guilty. I captured his partners in the robbery a little while ago, and they came clean about all of it, even about how they got rid of their weapons in the Bay. You understand? *Deegan is guilty! Nobody needed to plant any evidence!*"

Cotten was shaking his head in bafflement. "I don't . . . I didn't hear anything about it . . ."

"I called Painter direct," Shayne said tiredly. "He's bringing in the other three robbers right now, but I convinced him to let me come ahead alone. I wanted to tell Wells about it."

"You knew he sent some men after you?"

"I figured it had to be him. The three robbers that were still loose tried to kill me earlier in the day, but the two that grabbed me tonight said they didn't want me dead. All that left was Wells. And he wouldn't have sent them after me unless he had something to hide. I knew for sure then that he was framing Deegan. At least he thought he was."

Cotten shook his head. "I've got to get an ambulance. I — I just can't believe it."

"Believe it. Me, I don't look forward to telling Deegan's father. He seemed like a decent man, and I liked him."

"A decent man . . . That's what I always thought Harry was." Cotten stood up. "You just take it easy. I'll get an ambulance and get you both to the hospital."

Wells' eyes flickered open as Cotten started running back down the path. Cotten had left his flashlight on the ground, and the glow from it washed over Wells' face. It stood out sharply in the shadows, so pale that it looked like something from an old movie, a study in chiaroscuro. "Shayne . . . ?"

"Take it easy. Cotten's gone for help."

"You said . . . Deegan was guilty all along?"

"That's right." Shayne thought about telling Wells that he had really saved his life, that the bitter ex-con, Charles Foster, wouldn't be gunning for him now, but he decided against it. He felt a little sick when he saw the grin that stretched across Wells' face and made him look like a death's-head in the harsh glare.

"I knew it all along," Wells said, and he laughed. "I knew it all along!"

Shayne sat in his own blood, holding his wounded leg, and wished to hell that Cotten would hurry up.

And Wells kept laughing . . .

Next month
Mike Shayne returns in

THE STALKER OF BISCAYNE BAY
by Brett Halliday

Don't miss it!

Betsy opened the door, but she wasn't smiling. Perry saw why. Behind her was a man with a gun!

Rubbish

by EDWARD D. HOCH

SOMETIMES IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR PERRY BROOKS to remember exactly how he came to be working as a trash collector for the city of Greenhaven. He'd grown up in the midwest and come east to attend Greenhaven College. The trash collecting job was only to be something for the summers — raising a little extra money after his parents' divorce cut off the funds from home.

But somehow after a couple of years college faded into the background. For a time he was on drugs — stronger stuff than the pot he'd occasionally smoked since high school — and it seemed in those days that collecting rubbish for a living was a lot easier than going back to a classroom.

So here he was, at age 25, working every day on a rubbish truck that snaked its way slowly up and down the streets on the north side of the city. He was a "loader," which meant it was his job to empty the rubbish cans by the side of the garage or behind the house, wheel his big plastic barrel of trash out to the curb, and empty it into the maw of the waiting truck.

It wasn't really hard work, but it wasn't the cleanest job in the world either. For weeks after he started going around with Betsy Fallon he

managed to be vague about what he did for a living. Finally one night when they were sitting at the corner table in the Pig's Eye she asked him again. "I thought I told you," he mumbled. "I'm a collector."

"A bill collector?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, what then?" Betsy was a tall, slim girl with an aggressive personality. He'd met her at the Pig's Eye, but it was hard to say which of them had picked up the other.

He could see now there was no way out of telling her the truth. "I'm working as a refuse collector — just temporarily."

"Refuse? You mean garbage?"

"There's no garbage connected with it any more. Most people in the section I work have garbage disposers in their sinks, and the rest of the junk gets wrapped up neat in those plastic bags. It's not bad work, really."

"How long have you been doing it?" She shifted positions a bit, as if pulling back from him.

"A few years. Six, I guess." What the hell, he might as well tell her the truth. "It was just summers at first."

"Six! Didn't you tell me you went to college?"

"Well, I started to. It's a long story."

"You're a funny guy, Perry."

"Does it make that much difference what I do?"

She thought about it for just a moment. Then she looked up and said, "No, I guess not. But I never went out with a rubbish collector before."

THE PAY ON THE JOB WAS ACTUALLY PRETTY GOOD — better than he could have earned starting in at some office. Their union had won a good increase from the city, while avoiding efforts to trim the crews to just two men per truck. Perry usually worked with another loader and a driver. The driver often changed, but the loader was generally a jovial Puerto Rican named Ray Galante. About once a month he managed to ask, "What're you doin' on this job anyhow, huh? You should be teachin' school or sumthing."

"I love my work, Ray," he replied, upending the plastic trash bucket into the loader. The machinery started grinding, compacting the trash as it disappeared into the bowels of the truck.

They were working down a pleasant side street, through a thickness of fallen October leaves that reminded Perry of his boyhood days in the midwest. Falling leaves had always been associated with a return to school in his mind, though the two events might have been separated

by as much as a month's time.

Galante chuckled. "You love it so much, you take the next three houses on that side, let me have a break."

"That's easy. The one in the middle's empty."

He always remembered the dark brown house because of the three plastic trash barrels that sat outside the closed garage. Week after week he walked up the driveway and looked in the barrels, but they were always empty. Once, a few weeks back, he'd stolen a glance through the kitchen window. Not surprisingly, the house was empty. There was not even a stove or refrigerator in the kitchen. A nice little house to stand empty for so long, he'd thought, wondering why nobody lived there or at least put it up for sale. Perhaps there'd been a divorce or a death in the family and the house was a pawn to some legal technicality.

Approaching it now through the fallen leaves he was ready to skip it and go on to the next house. Still, the three barrels were waiting in place by the closed garage door and he did have rules to follow. He pushed his wheeled trash collector up the driveway and lifted one of the lids.

Empty.

He lifted the second lid.

Empty.

And the third.

There was something in the bottom now, something he'd never seen there before. A black typewriter ribbon half unreeled from its spool.

Odd.

He lifted it out and tossed it into his collection barrel.

A typewriter ribbon. In an empty house.

Probably someone passing by had dropped it in. Some neighbor, perhaps.

He went on to the next house, hefting a couple of plastic trash bags into his barrel. Then he wheeled it back to the waiting truck.

"Look at this," he said to Galante. "A typewriter ribbon from the empty house."

"Ha! Probably a ghost writin' letters!"

There was ink on Perry's fingers from touching it. He wiped them against his pants and tossed the reel into the maw of the truck along with the plastic trash bags. "Maybe somebody found it in the yard and tossed it in the barrel."

BY THE TIME THEY'D FINISHED THEIR ROUTE THAT DAY he'd forgotten about the discarded typewriter ribbon. In fact he didn't think

of it again until two nights later when he was out with Betsy at the Pig's Eye. She was taking a couple of evening courses, working toward a degree in sociology, and she mentioned having to type a paper.

"Speaking of typing, let me tell you something that happened at work."

"At work! You make it sound like an office!" She smiled as she said it, taking some of the sting from her words.

Nevertheless, he pressed on, telling her about the empty house and the typewriter ribbon. "Now here's my question," he said at last. "If there is somebody secretly using the house, why would they put that typewriter ribbon in the rubbish barrel?"

Betsy sipped her beer and lit a cigarette. "That's simple," she said finally. "No waste baskets."

"What?"

"You said the house was completely empty. That means there are no waste baskets. If someone sneaked in there with a portable typewriter and had to change the ribbon, what would he do with the old one? There are no waste baskets and he couldn't just leave it lying on the floor. The barrels outside would be the only logical place to put it."

"You're wrong there," he was quick to point out. "The mystery typist could have put the old ribbon in his pocket and taken it away with him."

"Only if he was going away. Suppose he's still in the house?"

It was a fascinating possibility — a mystery typist lurking somewhere in that little house, perhaps peeking out when he came to collect the rubbish, then scurrying back to his typewriter.

"I'll have to look for him next week," Perry promised her.

IT WAS TUESDAY WHEN THEY COLLECTED ON Sylvan Street, where the brown house was, and by the following Tuesday all the leaves were off the trees. "It looks like winter," Ray Galante complained, pushing his hand truck along in front of him. "Feels like it too!"

"I don't mind it," Perry said. "A little snap in the air keeps you on your toes."

They reached the driveway of the brown house and Ray started to turn in. "Want me to get it?"

"You do the other side. I might get lucky and find another typewriter ribbon."

The blank windows of the house stared back at him as he started up the driveway. No curtains or shades, no sign of life. He peered in the

garage window, but it was empty except for a few scrap pieces of wood. Then he checked the barrels.

It was in the second barrel this time, only it wasn't a typewriter ribbon. It was a crumpled piece of carbon paper.

He stuffed it in the pocket of his jacket, because he had to think about what it meant before he threw it away.

Back at the truck Galante asked, "No typewriter ribbon today?"

"No, I guess it was just a one-time thing."

He wondered then why he didn't tell Ray about the carbon paper. What was he expecting to find back at that house, and why did he want to keep it for himself?

Later that afternoon, back in his little one-room apartment, he smoothed out the carbon paper and studied its inky surface. It had not been used too much, and the typing was still legible in spots. On one side there seemed to be a column of figures, and then, typed partly over it, a letter addressed to someone named Millie.

He held it up to the bathroom mirror. The letter wasn't very long, and if he could get the carbon paper smoothed out enough he should be able to read it, even with the column of figures overlaying one portion of it.

Dear Millie, it read, I want you to know that I'm safe. Whatever you've heard from others I hope you won't judge me until you hear why I did it. Please try to make the children understand. I'll be in touch with you again as soon as I can. Love, Fred.

Next he tried to make out the column of figures. He couldn't read some of them too well, but the total at the bottom was clear: \$88,566.

That was a great deal of money, and he wondered what it meant.

THAT WEEK HE DIDN'T SEE BETSY UNTIL FRIDAY NIGHT, but he remembered to mention the crumpled carbon paper to her. "It sounded like a note from a husband who'd skipped out on his wife," he said.

But the note and the column of figures excited Betsy. "What did you say the names were — Millie and Fred?"

"That's right."

"There was something in the paper a few weeks ago. God, I wish I could remember it!" She pondered, biting at her lower lip. "I haven't thrown out the papers in weeks. Let's go back to my place and look for it."

Perry grinned. "I like spending the evening at your place."

"Calm down. This is research."

Back at Betsy's little second-floor apartment he helped her go through the pile of old newspapers on the kitchen floor. After ten minutes of searching she gave a squeal of triumph. "This is it — only two weeks ago!"

The headline on the first page of the second section read: *Banker Missing With \$85,000*. The article began: *Police are searching for Frederick Ober, 36, assistant manager of the mortgage department at Chemical National Bank, following discovery that upwards of \$85,000 is missing from a small vault at the bank's main office. Loss of the money was discovered this morning by Norman Acton, another employee, who reported that only he and Ober had access to the vault where the money was kept. Ober's wife, Millicent, told police that her husband failed to return home from the bank last evening, and efforts to locate him have been unsuccessful.*

"There you are!" Betsy announced triumphantly. "Millie and Fred! And it was eighty-eight thousand, not eighty-five! He must have added up the various denominations of money."

"Added it up on a typewriter?"

"Sure! Just to see it in black and white!"

"You think he's hiding in that house with the money?"

"He might be." She glanced through the following days' papers, but after a few days the story just died. Apparently it was assumed Ober had fled the city. "I think he stayed close."

"But why wouldn't he try to get out of town?"

"I don't know." She had an idea. "Want to go look?"

"What — the two of us?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"He could be dangerous. I don't think we should go prowling around in a dark house after a criminal."

"Not tonight, silly! I'm talking about tomorrow. You do have Saturdays off, don't you?"

"Sure, but —"

"Then we'll go there and look around."

"Break into the house in broad daylight? That makes a lot of sense!"

"I'm learning things in my sociology class. A few weeks ago we had a former burglar talk to us about his life of crime. I learned some great ways to break into houses."

"I don't think I want to hear them."

"Oh, you're so law-abiding! What about when you were on pot and LSD and that other stuff?"

"I told you that was over. I have a joint once in a while and that's all."

Her grin turned impish. "Then it's time you had some excitement. Tomorrow I'll show you how to break into a house."

PERRY DROVE OVER TO PICK UP BETSY AT ELEVEN the next morning. She came bouncing out to the car carrying a stack of fliers for a political candidate. "Robinson for City Council!" he scoffed. "What're these for?"

"In case someone wonders what we're doing in the neighborhood! It's a perfect cover two weeks before the election."

"Did your burglar teach you that too?"

"No, I thought it up on my own. Come on."

They parked a block away, on the next side street, and walked over to Sylvan Street. Betsy even trotted up the driveways of the houses they passed, dutifully distributing her literature. Finally they were at the door of the empty brown house. "It's locked, just like I said."

"Let's try the garage," Betsy suggested. "People often leave the overhead door unlocked."

He wouldn't have believed it but she was right. They entered the garage and he pulled the door down after them. "Why would it be open?" he wondered.

"Nothing here to steal. But there is a door from the garage to the house and we can work on it at our leisure."

"I don't think I like breaking and entering."

She tried the knob. "Then you're in luck. It's unlocked."

They entered the empty kitchen, moving quietly. Perry was the first to spot a key on one of the counters. A tag attached to it read, *Mortgage Department, Chemical National Bank*.

"Oh, of course!" Betsy exclaimed, breaking their silence but keeping her voice low. "The bank held the mortgage on this house! They foreclosed or somehow ended up with it. And Fred Ober worked in the Mortgage Department."

"Yeah," he admitted. "It begins to make sense."

They moved through the ground floor rooms without finding anything else. "If he left the key he might still be around," Betsy said. "Let's try upstairs."

The upstairs was empty too, and then all that remained was the basement. Perry led the way, snapping on the light because the small cellar windows admitted only a minimum of daylight.

They saw the typewriter first — a compact foreign model in its unzipped plastic carrying case, resting on an upturned wooden crate. Then they saw the body.

"You'd better see if that phone upstairs is working," Perry told her. "And get some police out here. I think we've found Fred Ober."

THEIR EXPLANATION OF FINDING THE BODY interested a somewhat puzzled detective sergeant named O'Donoghue. "You mean you broke into this house because you found a bit of rubbish in the can outside?" he asked, scratching his chin.

Betsy sighed and went through the whole story again. "We didn't break into anything, Sergeant. I told you what happened. The door was unlocked."

"You still violated the law by —"

"It was an uninhabited dwelling, Sergeant. Now are you interested in arresting us for trespassing or in finding a suspected embezzler?"

"All right, O'Donoghue said with some exasperation. "We'll talk about that part later. Either of you know the dead man?"

"It's Ober, isn't it?" Perry asked.

"Yeah, it's him. At least it looks like his pictures. It appears he shot himself through the head with that pistol by the body."

"What about the missing money?"

"We found a few thousand dollars in the case under the typewriter, along with a brief note reading simply, *I'm sorry, Millie.*"

A bald man wearing horn-rimmed glasses came up from the basement. "How long's he been dead, Doc?" the detective asked.

"I'd guess at couple of weeks, but I'll know better after the autopsy. That basement is cool, and dry, so the body didn't decay as fast as it might have."

"Suicide?"

"Looks that way."

Perry watched them carry out the remains in a plastic body bag, but Betsy looked away. She told him she'd remember the smell of it for the rest of her life. O'Donoghue went back to questioning them both after the body was gone, but it had become a mere routine for him. "Tell you what," he said at last. "I want both of you to come down to my office at Headquarters on Monday morning at ten o'clock and dictate a statement. That'll be the end of it as far as I'm concerned."

Perry thanked him and they left the house. "Well," Betsy decided, "I suppose he could have arrested us if wanted to."

"Yeah," he agreed glumly. "As it is I'll have to take the morning off from work."

"Think we'll get our names in the papers?"

"I hope not."

The story received a moderately big play in Sunday morning's

papers: *Embezzler is Suicide in Bank-Owned House*. And both their names were prominently mentioned, in a way that made it sound as if they'd entered the house with lovemaking in mind.

Betsy read it with a chuckle. "Does it embarrass you to be linked with me in the public press?" she asked.

"Not at all. But it does make us seem like a couple of high school kids out for a cheap thrill."

"If you read it all, it mentions your finding the carbon paper."

"Yeah," he admitted, but he still wasn't happy about it.

They went down to Headquarters on Monday morning and sat by O'Donoghue's desk in a corner of the squadroom while a police stenographer took down their statements. "We haven't found the rest of the money yet," the detective told them, "but it'll turn up. He sure didn't live long enough to spend it. The autopsy report estimates he was dead about two weeks when you found him."

Something jarred in Perry's brain. "He couldn't have been dead that long. There must be a mistake."

Sergeant O'Donoghue smiled indulgently. "That doesn't happen too often with autopsy reports."

"But look, this is Monday. I found the typewriter ribbon two weeks ago tomorrow, and the carbon paper a week ago tomorrow. He had to be alive *after* I picked up the ribbon, in order to throw away the carbon paper — and that was only eleven days before we found him."

"Maybe you missed the carbon paper the first time. His wife received the note a few days after he disappeared, though we didn't make it public at the time."

"Not a chance that I missed it! I looked in all three barrels!"

The detective shrugged. "I suppose Doc could have been off by a few days. It's not that important."

They signed the statements and left the building. Maybe it wasn't that important. By the afternoon papers the story seemed to be dying for a second time. There was mention of the missing money, but only in passing. The police were questioning Frederick Ober's wife. But she insisted her only contact with him had been the single typed note she received in the mail.

That should have been the end of it, as far as Perry and Betsy were concerned.

"WHAT'RE YOU DOIN' ON THIS JOB, ANYHOW?" Ray Galante asked the following morning as they were pushing their hand trucks down the center of a street a few blocks north of Sylvan.

"You ask me that all the time, Ray," Perry replied with a grin. "I

told you I like my work.”

“Sure — now that you’re a celebrity! Everyone’ll be wantin’ you to go through their rubbish for clues!”

Perry laughed out loud. He was aware of a car turning onto the street behind him but he kept on walking. “Ray, I — ”

Suddenly Ray yelled and yanked him by the arm, pulling them both over on the leaf-littered street. The car behind them had gunned its engine and roared past, its right front fender grazing the side of Perry’s leg as he went down.

“Damn fool!” Ray Galante shouted, rising to his knees to shake a fist at the speeding car. It never slowed, but skidded around the next corner and out of sight. “Did you get his license number?” he asked Perry.

“I — No, I didn’t know what was happening.” Perry pulled up his pants leg to inspect a stretch of scraped skin.

“He tried to run us down, that’s what was happening! Hell, if I hadn’t yanked you out of the way you’d be a hunk of meat now.”

Perry got shakily to his feet and brushed himself off. “Yeah. Thanks, Ray.”

That evening he phoned Betsy and told her someone had tried to kill him. “Are you sure, Perry? Why would anyone want to do that?”

“I don’t know. Maybe there’s something I saw. Maybe, you know, it has to do with Ober’s death.”

“How could it?”

“Well, if the autopsy was right about him being dead two weeks before we found him, maybe someone else put that rubbish in the barrel.”

“But that would mean — ”

“Yeah. That maybe he didn’t kill himself after all.”

“Perry, can you come over? Right now? We’ve got to think this thing through together.”

“I’m on my way.”

Twenty minutes later he was knocking on the door of Betsy’s second-floor apartment, down the block from the Pig’s Eye bar. She came almost at once, but there was something about her face that was different. Where she usually greeted him with a smile, now her expression seemed closed to him.

“Betsy — what’s the matter?” He pushed his way in, though she seemed to be blocking the doorway.

“There was a knock five minutes ago and I thought it was you,” she said quietly.

He looked beyond her then and saw the man. He was pointing a

small revolver at Betsy's back. "Come in and close the door," he said.

He was a tall man wearing a gray suit. Perry had never seen him before, but he had the feeling this was the man who'd tried to run him down earlier. "Who are you?" he asked.

It was Betsy who answered the question. "His name is Norman Acton. He worked with Ober at the bank, and he murdered him."

NORMAN ACTON MOVED A BIT TO THE RIGHT so he could cover them both with the revolver. "That's a pretty harsh accusation to make, young lady."

"If it weren't true you wouldn't be pointing that gun at us. You stole that money from the bank, then lured Ober out to the empty house on some pretext of mortgage department business. You shot him in the basement and arranged everything to look like suicide. You even planted a small amount of money to be discovered with the body. Then you typed a letter to Ober's wife, strengthening the premise of his guilt. You made a carbon copy of the letter — probably so you'd remember what you said in case you wrote a follow-up. That was your first mistake. You'd changed the ribbon on the typewriter a week earlier — maybe before you even killed Ober at the house — and Perry found the ribbon in the trash can. Then he found the carbon paper, and he managed to read it out of curiosity. It led us to find the body, which wouldn't have mattered too much except that Ober had been dead before he could possibly have left that carbon paper in the trash can."

"That was why he tried to kill me today," Perry said. "He knew from the newspaper account that there was a danger I'd work out that timing and realize Ober had been murdered!"

"Exactly! And when he missed you he decided to come after me. Of course I should have been suspicious when you first showed me that piece of carbon paper. The name *Fred* was typed at the end of the note, but a man sending a note like that to his wife would be far more likely to sign his name."

"Why was Acton worried enough to come after us?" Perry asked, as if they were conversing with each other and the man with the gun didn't exist.

"Don't you see? If Ober didn't kill himself it had to be Acton behind the whole thing. The newspaper said only the two of them had access to the vault. The same with the empty house. It had to be someone in the bank's mortgage department who used the key. If Ober was dead when that note was typed, everything pointed to Acton."

"Why did you two have to get involved?" Norman Acton muttered. "It was such a perfect crime. How could I figure on a rubbish man?"

"Are you going to kill us, too?" Betsy asked, as if sensing some hesitation.

"I'm not a murderer," Acton insisted. "Ober egged me on. I think he wanted to die. Some men do, you know. I think he knew I lured him there to kill him. I needed money and this was a chance to get it and dispose of Ober at the same time."

Betsy took a step toward him as Perry tensed. "Give me the gun," she said quietly. "You don't want to use it."

Acton took a deep breath and raised it to his own temple. Betsy hit his wrist with the butt of her hand and the gun went off, drilling a neat hole in the ceiling. Then Perry was on top of him too, and he went down beneath them.

THE NEXT MORNING THERE WERE MORE HEADLINES in the papers, and even a picture of Perry and Betsy with Sergeant O'Donoghue. "I guess my friend Galante was right," Perry brooded. "I'm not cut out to be a rubbish collector. I take too much interest in the rubbish."

"What are you going to do?" Betsy asked.

"Maybe go back to school." He gave her a hug as they walked through the fallen leaves. "Maybe I can even get a loan from Chemical National Bank!"

Continued from page 5

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

Born in London, England, **PETER MAGNUS** (*Faithful Unto Death*)

ran away from home when he was 17 and had travelled all over Europe and served three years in the British army by the time he was 22. His first published short story was written when he was 15, "under half a century ago" and as well as about 300 entries in British and American magazines, he has a spy novel and radio and TV plays to his credit. "Married to a wife and a typewriter, not always in that order," he says that he gets very twitchy if unable to cover at least 30,000 foreign miles a year at somebody else's expense. He collects antique firearms and enjoys shooting modern ones — "But only at targets, finding no great buzz in killing things, or even attempting it, after getting my fill of being fired at for the same purpose."

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She thought she was just buying an island. But along with it came the lives and destinies of all the natives!

Mother Love

by RICHARD DEMING

OSTENSIBLY PAMELA QUILLAN PURCHASED THE ISLAND of Paraquito from General Alfredo Mendez because she wanted an isolated retreat to recover from the breakup of her sixth marriage. But the underlying reason was simply that she didn't own an island, and when you are a chain store heiress with four hundred million dollars to ease your boredom, you can afford to indulge multimilliondollar whims.

General Mendez's reasons for selling the island, whose ownership by his family traced back to a sixteenth-century royal grant by the king of Spain, was more apparent than Pamela's reason for buying. Technically Paraquito, which was situated in the Mona Passage halfway between the islands of Hispaniola and Puerto Rico, was part of the Dominican Republic. After backing an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the government of the Dominican Republic, General Mendez thought it discreet to unload his ancestral home and run for Europe before it occurred to the government to confiscate it. Pamela got it lock, stock and barrel for eight million dollars.

Although supposedly subject to the laws of the Dominican Republic, for all practical purposes the only law on Paraquito for 400 years had been the decrees of the Mendez family, whose power rested on the simple economic fact that the Carib natives were living on and farming Mendez land, which put them in the same relationship to the island's

owner as that of medieval serfs to their barons. The Indians, still nearly as primitive as they had been when the first Spanish conquistadors landed on the island, were used to and accepted despotic rule.

Pamela inherited this absolute power when she acquired title to the island.

Although the initial idea behind the purchase had been to isolate herself from the outside world, Pamela quickly fell so in love with the island that she seldom visited the various other homes she maintained around the world, even after her marital scars healed. Paraquito possessed something increasingly difficult to find anywhere: a combination of unspoiled primitive beauty and all modern conveniences. The twenty-room house, surrounded by several smaller buildings that housed servants and livestock, was as up-to-date as a Hilton hotel, yet was within walking distance of primeval jungle.

Pamela's favorite spot became the tide pools on the coral reef off the north shore, clear across the island from the house. The south shore was an unbroken stretch of white sand beach. The northern shore was bounded by a solid line of towering cliffs that looked down onto a pounding surf. A single wide stream, fed by a central lake, poured through a gap in the cliffs, giving the only access to the reef. The tide pools were always full of fascinating things such as star fish, sea horses, sea anemones and baby octopuses, as well as a great variety of colorful shells. Pamela could spend hours investigating them.

ON HER FIRST VISIT SHE INNOCENTLY SUGGESTED to her muscular young Indian guide that they take a dip in the relatively calm stretch of water between the reef and the cliff some hundred yards away. Paxhali gazed at her with his mouth open.

"Shark," he said finally. "Too many shark."

Frowning at the gently rolling surface. Pamela suddenly saw three large fins simultaneously emerge and race away in formation. Paxhali saw them too.

"Great white shark," he said. "All big fellow, maybe eighteen, twenty feet long. Sometimes grow thirty feet long."

"Are there any off the south shore too?" she asked apprehensively, thinking of the many times she had swum there.

"Oh, no. Water too shallow. Deep here, also full of fish. No worry about swim off south beaches."

Learning that the lagoon was infested with man-eating sharks didn't spoil Pamela's enjoyment of the reef because it seemed apparent there was danger only if you went swimming. Because of the excellent fishing, the lagoon was always dotted with native canoes, which the

sharks made no effort to molest. Pamela felt that if the flimsy canoes were safe, her fiberglass speedboat had to be.

A small thorn in her garden of happiness was her discovery of the title the natives had bestowed on her. She learned of it the day Paxhali brought a shy teenage Indian girl to the house and asked Pamela's permission to marry.

"Why do you ask me?" Pamela inquired.

"Because you are *La Madre*."

"I'm not your mother," Pamela said indignantly. Only forty-two, and looking no more than thirty as a result of diet, exercise and plastic surgery, she resented the suggestion that she was old enough to give motherly advice.

Looking confused, the young Indian guide said, "You are the mother of all, *Senora*."

"All who?" Pamela demanded.

"Those on the island. I can no marry Wawaiya without you permit."

While being regarded as a mother figure by some 1200 Carib Indians didn't particularly appeal to her, Pamela grudgingly found some humor in it. "All right, you have my permission," she said. "When's the wedding?"

"At the new moon. Twenty day."

"Am I supposed to give away the bride?"

"Wawaiya and I would be honor."

"All right," Pamela said indulgently. "Give me a few days notice."

Later she inquired of Juan DiMarco why the natives had bestowed the *La Madre* title on her. Pamela had inherited the affable thirty-six-year-old bachelor from General Mendez, for whom DiMarco had served as overseer. In Europe the general didn't need an overseer, but the island still did. DiMarco supervised the native farms and the fishing industry, handled the export of grain and fish, the import of needed goods, and generally ran the business of the island.

"The natives are essentially children," the overseer explained in answer to Pamela's question. "The senior male member of the Mendez has been called *El Padre* for generations. You are the first female ruler Paraquito ever had."

"What do you mean, ruler?"

"Don't you understand that you have absolute power here, Pam? You could order natives whipped, or even shot, if you wanted to."

"That's terrible! I would never do either!"

"There's nothing to prevent you being a benevolent dictator, if that's your bag," DiMarco said with a smile. "It will bemuse the natives, because the Mendezes were pretty despotic. But they'll adjust

to it. They've been adjusting to the whims of dictators for four hundred years."

"Don't call me a dictator," Pamela objected. "I just bought the island, not the people on it."

"You bought the whole ball of wax," the overseer told her. "You may as well get used to reigning."

WHEN PAMELA WAS READY TO COME OUT of her self-imposed isolation, it was unnecessary for her to leave the island in order to re-join the international jet set. She merely let it be known that she was back in circulation, and the Beautiful People came to her, the possession of 400 million dollars being a powerful social magnet.

She started in a small way by scheduling what she whimsically called her "coming out party" for about two dozen of her closest friends. One of the invited guests was the internationally famous race car driver, Baronet Ambrose Harding. He was an old friend, but it occurred to Pamela that there was at least a possibility that their relationship would now ripen into something even more intimate. The baronet had been divorced from his second wife about the same time Pamela was shedding her sixth husband. He was about ten years younger than her, but all except her first husband had been several years younger. While she was not yet consciously husband hunting, she looked forward to seeing the baronet in his new bachelor status.

All but a half dozen of the guests would arrive aboard various yachts. The other six, who all happened to be on the Riviera when their invitations arrived, were flying together from there to San Juan, where they were scheduled to land at 7:30 Saturday morning. Because Ambrose Harding was in that group, Pamela decided to go along when her pilot flew her private plane to meet them.

Pamela and Juan DiMarco breakfasted together at six Saturday morning. Tom York, the pilot, had already breakfasted and was checking out the jet preparatory to taking off for Puerto Rico at six-thirty.

They were just finishing breakfast when the distant sound of a drum-beat came from the interior of the island. There was no rhythm to the sound, merely being a series of discordant thumps, repeated several times.

"What's that?" Pamela asked DiMarco.

He shrugged. "I don't read the drums."

"Read them? You mean some kind of message?"

"Uh huh. Louquo can read them." He turned to the Indian girl who was just pouring them second cups of coffee. "Tell the *criado principal* to step in, Pahali."

The chief servant was a wizened but erect man of seventy. After listening to the drumbeat, he said that one of the natives of a village near the central lake had been bitten by a water moccasin.

Pamela said in surprise, "I thought there weren't any snakes on Caribbean islands."

"The moccasin is the only kind on Paraquito," Louquo said with a curious air of apology. "What does *La Madre* wish to reply?"

"Don't call me that," Pamela said irritably. "I'm not your mother. Why should I reply anything? Isn't it just a news bulletin?"

The old man shook his head. "The message is meant for you. It asks if you can obtain some white-man medicine."

"Don't the natives have any treatment for snakebite?"

"Yes, senora, for ordinary bites. But this was in the neck."

"Jesus," DiMarco said. "We'll have to get the poor devil to San Juan for antitoxin."

Frowning, Pamela asked Louquo how long it would take to get the snakebite victim to the house.

"Two hours, perhaps, with the fastest canoemen."

Looking at her watch, Pamela said, "If the plane's on time, we could be back by then."

Staring at her, DiMarco said, "You certainly don't plan to take off now, before the victim gets here."

"I certainly don't plan to let my guests cool their heels for two hours at the San Juan airport."

After gazing at her for several more seconds, the overseer said to the aged *criado principal*, "That will be all, Louquo," then said to the maid serving them, "We won't need you anymore either, Pahali."

When both servants were gone, Pamela said, "I take it you want privacy because I'm going to get a lecture."

DiMarco nodded. "About the facts of life on Paraquito. Will you get it through your head, Pam, that you are absolute ruler here, and as such have some definite responsibilities?"

"I am not absolute ruler!"

The overseer made an impatient gesture. "You are in the eyes of the natives. They're used to despotic rule, and could understand harshness, or even cruelty, because a long line of Mendezes subjected them to both for four centuries. But the Mendezes, like most enduring despots, also took care of their subjects when the need arose, much as harsh parents rise to protect their children in emergency, even though they tend to abuse them other times. The natives are accustomed to regarding the island's owner as a sort of all-knowing parent, which is why they labeled you *La Madre*. A cruel mother they could understand,

but they would never forgive *indifference*."

"Why are you making such a big deal of it, Juan? I'll be back in two-and-a-half hours at the latest."

"You don't know that. The flight into San Juan may be late. The victim could get here in an hour and a half, anyway, instead of two. Louquo's no canoeman. Believe me, it's extremely important, not just for humanitarian reasons, but for your status on this island, that you wait."

Tom York came in to tell Pamela the plane was ready for takeoff. Rising to her feet, Pamela said to the overseer, "Tell Louquo to have the patient brought here, and that Tom will fly him to San Juan as soon as we get back."

IT DID TAKE LESS TIME THAN LOUQUO HAD ESTIMATED for the canoemen to traverse the winding jungle stream from the lake. The snakebite victim arrived shortly after eight A.M. and was given a bed in the servants' quarters. At nine Pamela contacted the house by radio. There was no phone service on the island, but there was a short-wave radio room in the house, and Tom York had instructed all the house servants in its operation.

Juan DiMarco was out on the veranda, peering east in the hope of spotting the returning plane when the call came. The weather was clear, with a limitless ceiling, he was happy to see, but the ocean was getting rough. The guests arriving by yacht would probably be late, he thought, because headway against such high seas would be difficult.

When Louquo came to tell the overseer that their employer was on the radio, he hurried to the radio room and said into the mike, "Juan here, Pam."

Pamela's voice came from the speaker quite clearly. "Any of the guests show yet, Juan?"

"No, and they'll probably show late, because seas are running high. The snakebite victim has been here for nearly an hour, though. What's the holdup?"

"The flight was late. How is he?"

"It's a she, not a he. She looks to me like she's dying."

"Well, tell her we're doing everything we can for her. There's been a slight change of plans. I'm not going to be able to get back for a while, so I've made other arrangements. I want you to run the woman over to Mayagues in the speedboat. The public hospital there has been alerted that you're coming. They don't have any snakebite antitoxin, but I've arranged for some to be trucked there from San Juan."

"Pam, there isn't time for that. The victim's dying."

"Nonsense," Pamela's voice came from the speaker. "Mayagues isn't more than eighty miles from there, and the speedboat can do fifty miles an hour. You can get her there faster than I could fly back for her."

"Not today, I can't. I told you the seas are running high. We would be lucky to make it in four hours."

"Juan, there's nothing else to be done, so don't argue. We have to fly the plane to Nassau."

"Why?"

"Because Piggy and Sue Barton are stranded there. Their yacht has engine trouble. They phoned a message to the San Juan airport because they knew Tom was meeting the seven-thirty A.M. flight."

DiMarco said, "For God's sake, Pam, this is more important than your friends' inconvenience. Call them back and tell them to rent another yacht. If that's the Bartons I think it is, they have nearly as much money as you."

The voice coming from the speaker was sharp and definite. "Juan, Piggy and Sue's convenience is a lot more important to me than that of an ignorant savage I have never even seen. I am not those people's mother, you know, regardless of what they think."

The overseer had a sudden idea. "Why can't you charter a plane to send the serum and a doctor here?"

"I already thought of that. There's nothing available small enough to land on our airstrip. The local police have helicopters, but they aren't allowed to fly them into the jurisdiction of a foreign country. I'm not going to argue with you any more, Juan, because *I don't have time*. You had better get moving. Over and out."

DiMarco flipped the microphone switch from *Receive* to *Transmit* and said, "Wait a minute, Pam."

There was no reply.

Irritably the overseer turned away from the mike. Louquo was standing in the doorway.

"You hear all that?" DiMarco asked the old man.

Louquo nodded impassively.

"Then you know the situation. Have one of the maids make some kind of bed in the boat and have the patient carried down to it. Make sure she's wrapped warmly in blankets."

"*Si, senor*," the old man said.

IT WAS NEARLY TWO P.M. WHEN THE SMALL JET RETURNED from Nassau loaded with guests. They had already started partying on the plane, and everyone was in such a gay mood, Pamela completely

forgot to inquire about the snakebite victim until she suddenly realized a couple of hours later that Juan DiMarco was missing. Then she hunted up Louquo to ask what had happened.

"*Senor* DiMarco took the girl in the boat right after you radioed," the old man said.

"Girl?" Pamela said. "I thought it was a woman."

"Well, yes, *senora*, but a young one. About eighteen."

"Juan should be back by now," Pamela said with a frown. "I didn't mean for him to wait until the patient is fully recovered. Ask him to report to me as soon as he returns."

The boat didn't return until six P.M. By then all the guests had arrived and the party was in full swing. Juan DiMarco found Pamela on one of the upstairs balconies with a handsome, bronzed man she introduced as Sir Ambrose Harding.

The overseer's clothing was drenched with salt water and he looked exhausted. After politely shaking hands with the baronet, he said to Pamela in a tired voice, "Louquo said you wanted to see me."

"Yes. How did things go?"

"About as I expected. She was dead on arrival. The doctor figured she'd been dead about an hour, which means about three hours after we left."

"Three hours? It took you four hours to make eighty miles?"

"I told you it would." After a period of silence, DiMarco added, "At the request of the father I brought the body back. He went along in the boat. According to native belief the girl's spirit would forever wander instead of entering the eternal jungle if she weren't buried on home ground."

"I see," Pamela said. There was another period of silence before she finally said, "I'm sorry."

"I knew you would be," the overseer said.

Making an abrupt about-face, he went back inside.

"What was that all about?" the baronet asked.

"One of the island's Indians was bitten by a snake. Juan took her by speedboat to Mayagues on the west coast of Puerto Rico, about eighty miles from here. Unfortunately he didn't get there in time."

"That's too bad," the baronet said.

Pamela grew conscious of someone standing in the arched doorway onto the balcony. Glancing that way, she saw it was Louquo.

Because she suspected he had been standing there listening to the whole conversation with the overseer, her tone was a trifle sharp. "Well?"

"When does the *senora* wish the buffet served?" the old man in-

quired in his most formal manner.

Glancing at her watch, Pamela said in a more pleasant tone, "Not for about an hour, Louquo. Give the guests a little more cocktail time."

The weekend was not as great a success as Pamela had hoped. The guests seemed to enjoy themselves, but Pamela was disappointed in Ambrose Harding. While he obliquely implied that he was available for an affair if Pamela were interested, he made it quite clear that he had no desire to remarry which ruled him out completely so far as she was concerned. Despite her six husbands, there was a puritanical streak in Pamela that made it impossible for her to enter into casual affairs. As a matter of fact, the reason she had married so many times was that she was incapable of sleeping with any man out of wedlock.

ON MONDAY MORNING WHEN TOM YORK FLEW THE BARONET and his party back to San Juan, and the Bartons on to Nassau, Pamela did not go along. When the last yacht departed shortly afterward, she suddenly felt lonely. Hunting down Louquo, she told him to send someone to Paxhali's village to tell the guide she wanted to take the speedboat across the island after lunch.

Paxhali showed up a little after one P.M. and they took off along the winding jungle stream leading to the central lake about one-thirty. When the speedboat shot from the mouth of the freshwater outlet into the lagoon, only one old man in a canoe was fishing. Pamela waved to him as they went past, and he waved back.

The tide was just starting to come in when they arrived at the reef. Paxhali, as usual, pulled the bow of the boat up on the reef, they stood on guard near it while Pamela went to examine the tide pools.

Today there was an unusual wealth of sealife in the pools. Pamela became so fascinated that she was unaware of how much time had passed until water began to lap over her canvas shoes. Then, glancing around, she saw that only the higher portions of the reef were still above water. She was going to have to wade back to the boat.

At that moment she realized that although Paxhali still stood where she had left him, the speedboat was gone. Her gaze skimmed over the water in all directions, and she spotted the boat just as the pounding surf carried it crashing against the base of the cliff, smashing it to pieces.

How careless of Paxhali, she thought, irritated but hardly alarmed. There was no cause for alarm because the old man in the canoe was heading for the reef.

Paxhali stepped into the canoe while Pamela was still wading through knee-deep water in that direction. By the time she reached the

high spot where the young Indian had been standing, the canoe had drifted off a dozen yards. Pamela stood looking at it expectantly, waiting for its return. Paxhali was seated in the boat's center and had picked up a paddle. The old man, in the stern had his paddle in the water and was moving it just enough to keep the canoe stationary.

After a few moments, Pamela said, "What are you waiting for? Tell him to bring the canoe over here, Paxhali."

"He understands English, *senora*," the young Indian said. "His name, Pia."

Pamela said to the old man, "Pia, come here and get me."

Pia stared at her unblinkingly, still moving his paddle just enough to keep the canoe in place.

"What's the matter with him?" Pamela asked on a high note. "I thought you said he understood English."

"I guess he close his ears," Paxhali said. "He Wawaiya's father."

"Who?" she asked blankly.

"Wawaiya, my bride-to-be. You remember, the one bitten by *la serpiente*."

Pamela gazed at him openmouthed.

"We would return for you, *La Madre*, but we have no time," Paxhali said tonelessly. "Is something more important we must do. Is the funeral of Wawaiya today, and we must hurry there to make sure her *akamoue*, her spirit, goes to the eternal jungle."

His paddle sliced into the water, turning the canoe toward shore. Then both blades were driving the canoe toward the outlet with powerful strokes.

"Paxhali!" Pamela screamed. "Come back! Pia!"

The canoe shot through the wide gap in the cliff and disappeared upstream.

Pamela screamed for help until the water was halfway up her thighs, but no one answered. Eventually she had to swim for shore because she had no other choice.

Her only chance was to make for the outlet, because at high tide the surf raged against vertical rock either side of it. She thought she was going to make it until she got within twenty yards, but then discovered the current of the freshwater stream was too strong to swim against. It kept pushing her back.

She continued to struggle against the current until she was too exhausted to struggle any longer, then despairingly let it carry her back toward the reef.

She had been lucky on the way in, but halfway back to the reef the sharks discovered her.

The light in the window was a beckoning finger he could not resist. So what if the old lady he had to romance was withered and crazy? There were rewards that would make his impersonation worthwhile!

The Beacon

by TALMADGE POWELL

THE CANDLE WAS THE CLUE, THE BEACON, THE WAN GLOW of a single candle behind an old lace curtain in the decayed ghostliness of a once-splendid home.

Marley passed the place each evening as he drove in from his disgusting and demeaning job washing dishes in the kitchen of the country club. He didn't notice the candle right away. The dragging misery of his situation choked off errant impressions, such as the color of a sunset, the notes of a singing bird, or idle speculation about a candle burning behind a window.

He was in the clutches of a particularly tough parole officer who had set the tenor of their relationship at their very first meeting: "Marley, you are one of my pet dislikes, a lifelong criminal despite everything society has tried to do to rehabilitate you. During your misspent life you have done it all. Passed counterfeit money. Fenced stolen goods. Gone door to door selling bogus termite exterminations to little old widows. Colddecked suckers in illegal card games. Written rubber checks. Now at the age of . . . fifty-five, isn't it? . . . you've drawn a parole after doing time for embezzlement. You're a neat, trim, spry fellow, hardly gray and with all your original teeth. Take my advice. Don't even think of once more using that blank, innocent appearance

to worm your way into a sucker's confidence. Or is it asking too much for a change in personality? In any event, if as human beings we are brothers, you're going to find, until the final hour of your parole, that I'm one hell of a keeper."

The loathesome tyrant had taken Marley out to the country club and introduced him to the head chef, an enormous Italian who'd never relaxed the chains of Marley's parole-slavery from the very first moment.

The parole officer had made a single allowance, giving permission for Marley to buy and drive, within the county limits, a battered old car. But that was only because city bus-transit routes precluded the country club.

So each day was a hellish repetition: awaken in a squalid furnished room in the inner city; get through hours in which taverns and the kind of company Marley preferred were prohibited; drive out to the country club through Vanderling Estates, where the aura of so much old wealth and well being rubbed Marley absolutely raw; do the dishes the lordly dudes and their ladies befouled during lunch, dinner and sometimes a private party of an evening. Marley would burn, hearing the echoes of refined pleasure drifting back from the dining room. Occasionally, when the chef and second cook and salad girl and pastry chef had their backs turned, Marley would spit in the stock pot.

EACH NIGHT HE PASSED THE CANDLE IN THE WINDOW, never seeing it until the abysmal cruelty of his parole had only one more week to go. Even then, it was not the candle that caught his attention, but a white, ectoplasmic figure moving on the lawn in the moonlit darkness.

Marley held no truck with spooks, goblins or anything spiritual. But the glimpse of the ghostly figure caught and froze his gaze. He braked his wheezing car, an instinctive thought flashing through his mind. If someone was in trouble, perhaps he could play the Good Samaritan — and receive a suitable reward.

The apparition was a woman, rather tallish, thin and bony, clad in ankle-length gown, its white blending with her long fall of silvery hair. Her shoulders were slightly stooped, and Marley, unable to distinguish the features from this distance, received an impression of an old and wrinkled face.

Out of the shadows alongside the house came a heavyset man in the gray uniform of a chauffeur. He intercepted the woman in the middle of the lawn, spoke to her, and she compliantly nodded and walked toward the house. The servant watched until the front entrance had received her; then he returned along the driveway in the direction of

lighted quarters over a large double garage.

Marley saw the window candle at last, and it sparked his always-sharp curiosity. His gaze drifted about the portion of the estate visible to him. Although centered in Vanderling Estates, the place didn't quite belong, although it once must have been the hallmark of swank for neighbors to try and rival. The house was huge Normandy; the grounds were far flung; but the present-day details added up to a note of desertion and decay. The driveway was potholed; the hedges were raggedly untrimmed; the sweeping lawn was freckled with spots of brown; and the house itself was flecking paint and supporting guttering that was rotting away and hanging loose in spots.

An old recluse, Marley thought.

His eyes held on the brass marker beside the delivery entrance. The metal was slightly green with mold, but he could still make out the number: 341 Vanderling Boulevard. And the name: Vanderling.

No less. Same name as the rigidly restricted, old-family subdivision itself.

He saw a light flare in an upstairs window. It burned briefly, while the old woman returned to bed. Then the house was once more in stygian gloom — except for the single candle burning behind the tall, arched window downstairs.

The next evening, in a brief lull between periods of greasy-water-to-the-elbows, Marley mentioned to the chef, "Who's the old biddy in 341, right down the boulevard?"

"Wassa mat?"

"Curious, that's all. Wondered if she ever comes to the club for dinner. Bet she once did — sweeping like a princess royal."

The chef had no imagination or curiosity whatever. "You gotta time to yap-yap-yap, the mop, she'sa waiting."

As Marley drove home that night, he slowed the car to a crawl at 341 Vanderling Boulevard. No ghostly figures tonight. Nothing, except the still-life of a gloomy old mansion, the firefly of a candle glowing behind a front window. He wondered how many-nights a candle had burned there, and why.

THE NEXT DAY HE ARRIVED AT THE COUNTRY CLUB half an hour early. He sauntered over to the ivy-grown pro shop, fifty yards from the old-English motif of the main clubhouse. The gnarled, leathery old man — Lemuel, he was called — was coming from the barn where groundskeeping equipment was housed. In luck, Marley thought. Lemuel had spaded, clipped, mowed, pruned, planted for more years on the golf course than anyone could remember. His and

Marley's paths had crossed occasionally when Lemuel, taking old-employee privileges, would come through the rear door of the kitchen and fill a plate and retire to a stool in the far corner to chomp his meal. Marley rather liked the old cuss because nothing or nobody, including the chef, fazed Lemuel.

Today, in the shadows of the pro shop, Marley said his most pleasant hello, and Lemuel paused, wiping his creased, weathered face with a huge red bandanna. "How goes the pearl-diving?"

"Greasy," Marley said, "like always. How about a Coke?"

Lemuel flicked surprise through sun-bleached brows. He and Marley had often spoken pleasantly enough, and they shared the unspoken bonds of menial jobs, but this was the first time Marley had extended such an invitation.

"Why not?" Lemuel said.

They went in, bought their drinks, and retired to the outside bench behind the pro shop, rules forbidding their presence on the veranda that overlooked the front nine.

Marley wasted a brief minute chatting about an inconsequential, the weather. Then he said, stretching the truth a bit: "Had a hairy experience night before last. Old lady in a white nightgown walked right out in front of my car. Happened on the boulevard, at 341."

"Must have been Atha Vanderling," Lemuel said, killing half his Coke at a swallow.

"Vanderling? You mean, one of the original Estate tribes?"

"Last Vanderling left. Not a living creature to leave all them millions to."

Marley shifted on the hardness of the wooden bench. "I guess you know plenty about the Estates and the people."

"Been here since the day they redid the back nine and put in the long practice tee." Lemuel winked knowingly. "I could write a book. Sure as hell could." He sighed. "'Course nobody wants to hear about folks in the Estates the way they used to be."

"Sounds interesting to me. Say . . . why don't we meet here at the pro shop tomorrow a little earlier? We'll chew over some old times."

The prospect brought a nod of pleasure. "If the greenskeeper don't have me chinch-bugging on the front nine," Lemuel said. "Can't think of nothing I'd like better. I'm around from sunup to sundown six days a week."

CULTIVATING LEMUEL AS A BRAIN TO PICK; Marley in the next few days pieced Atha Vanderling into a composite from the old man's gossip. Awkward and painfully shy when she was young. A very sen-

sitive girl who'd known she was dense and not at all pretty. But the Vanderling money had provided specialists, to tutor her, correct the bucked teeth, design clothing that enhanced the bony figure. She was sent to ballet, riding, diction lessons. She was travelled in Europe. She was provided a debut. Money had worked a small miracle; even so, Atha had emerged into young womanhood as a plain-jane wallflower.

When she was in her barrenly lonely mid-twenties, she met Guthrie Linyard, a social hanger-on who was summer guesting with a neighbor of the Vanderlings. He set about wooing her, and the love-starved young woman's response had been blindly overwhelming. No one could get through to her. Her belief and faith in Guthrie were fanatical. He truly loved her, not her money, and she loved him.

The couple announced their engagement and were given the usual round of parties. The rapturous young simpleton flew to Paris to buy part of her trousseau.

Came the day of the wedding, and Guthrie vanished, leaving her in white satin, a bridal bouquet in her hands, a spectacle before the eyes of people she'd known all her life in the crowded church.

"Atha's pappy, as you may have guessed," Lemuel said, "finally turned the trick with Guthrie Linyard the morning of the wedding. Folks talked about it a long time. Old man Vanderling went into the church ante-room where Guthrie was all set to go in cutaway coat and striped trousers, and made his final offer. If Guthrie showed up at the altar, the old man was drawing a new will, cutting Atha out. Otherwise, there was a side door so's a man could slip out quietly and here was a package containing fifty thousand dollars cold cash, travelling money."

"And Atha never married?"

"Atha," Lemuel said, "was never far from the brink, first place. Atha went stark, staring crazy. Started right there at the altar, her beginning to-sob and finally running out in her wedding gown and veil, up and down the streets, looking to see if Guthrie had been hurt in an accident, screaming his name. When she learned what had really happened, she closed in on herself, like an oyster locking its shell. They spent plenty on her, in fancy asylums, and her pappy was never the same afterward. Finally, Vanderling money had done all it could. They were able to bring home what was left of Atha. She never went out, had no friends, although she could talk and act like she had good sense. But she was convinced that some day Guthrie would come back. The best doctors in New York and Vienna couldn't get that idea out of her head. And while her years melted away, she stayed on in the old home place, after her parents died, lighting a candle in a window every

night and waiting for Guthrie to return.”

Marley didn't as yet know how he would use the information; but his experience and instincts clearly told him that he was on the brink of something big, perhaps the biggest con of his life, the one that would set him up for all his years to come. The toughest part of any con was to locate a mark. The best of con men (the category in which Marley automatically included himself) sometimes went for months without using their talents because the right situation wouldn't show itself.

The expiration of his parole came and went, its impact shunted aside by the thoughts that suffused Marley of an old crazy woman worth millions.

“I guess,” the bohunk of a parole officer said grudgingly, “you'll swim out of the greasy dishwater and head for parts unknown.”

“I rather like the Estates,” Marley said.

HE CONTINUED HIS DIGGING — THROUGH LEMUEL, through old newspaper files, the local library, through a mole-like research into names associated with the Vanderlings. His keen imagination popped open kernels he ferreted from old gossip columns, notes on society and business pages. Immersed in his subject, he almost felt that he had once been part of the scene.

Exchanging greasy kitchen steam for the stink of his cheap room each night, he considered the angles.

He would face himself in the scaly mirror over the dresser, knock on an imaginary door, and when the door was opened he would look into Atha Vanderling's non-present eyes and rehearse.

Role of private investigator: “Miss Vanderling? I'm James C. Lyrerly. Here is my card. I have some information about a man named Guthrie Linyard . . .”

No. It could get too involved, foisting himself into her hire as a private detective. The ideal con was simple, direct.

A long-lost friend: “Atha, you remember me, of course. Jeremy Dekalb . . . My dear, the years haven't hurt you a bit . . .”

Nope. The link must be stronger than one of ancient friendship.

A distant relative: “Atha, I'm Peter Conway, all the way from Switzerland. Aunt Helen told me to be sure to look you up . . .” More than twenty years ago the local paper had Sunday-featured the removal of the Conway branch of the family to an executive position in a Swiss firm. But the distant relative was too risky. She might have despised Peter.

Marley would brood from his window at the scabby alleyway below. A pigeon isolated in her roost with no one to protect her . . . no father

left to come between her and a Guthrie Linyard, who had once come close to getting it all . . .

Catching a glimpse of his reflection in the dirty window, Marley felt the sudden creeping of a rather delicious numbness. As if hardly daring to trust his muscles, he turned toward the mirror. His mind unveiled the Guthrie Linyard shown in the society pages a generation ago when the Linyard-Vanderling engagement had promised the most expensive wedding of the season.

Marley lifted his hand, touching his chin. Same size . . . same coloration . . . Thirty years ago he'd resembled those old pictures of Guthrie Linyard in a general way. Who could say that Linyard wouldn't have aged into Marley's present image?

Suddenly too excited to breathe, Marley paced his room, beating his fists together.

The scenario . . . It had to be the best Marley had ever dreamed up.

Parts of it posed no problems. His assiduous research had yielded many threads for the weaving of a mask that would identify him as Guthrie Linyard, for whom the candle burned nightly. He knew that Guthrie had enjoyed sailing. A long-forgotten society page editor had noted the color of the gown worn by Atha Vanderling the night she and Linyard had topped the list of society names at a big benefit. The same editor had covered bridal showers given for Atha by Clarice Snowden and Margaret Fogg. The Leyer orchestra had played at the engagement party.

Names of long-ago friends, schools she'd attended, a minor auto accident involving her father, a charity drive headed by her mother . . . so many details concerning Atha and her family from the time of her childhood . . . Marley had them etched carefully in his mind. And once he was over the first hurdle — effecting entry — he would pump the old woman with the cunning and shrewd indirection of a gypsy fortune teller.

Intervention from outside? No sweat. She was a recluse, and he would dissolve into her life style. Fire the current chauffeur-handyman, hire a stranger. As Guthrie, he and Atha would share reunion, their great secret passion of togetherness, with no one. The prospect would please her right down to her toenails.

It was less attractive to Marley, the thought of togetherness with a crazy old harridan. But it had its redeeming facets. He could hire a maid, a cute, sexy, greedy young thing. And a cook — and dine on surf and turf any evening he desired. And once he was inside, he was quite certain, he would be wholly capable of reaping his harvest. There would surely be a situation involving her with lawyers, trustees and

other such deadbeats. But never mind. He didn't aspire to all of the Vanderling millions. Amounts that he could arrange to take over, and hence put him in a position of control, would be quite adequate.

THE BIG PROBLEM WAS GETTING INTO 341 VANDERLING. How does a fellow explain away a jilting at the altar that occurred thirty years ago? Throw himself on her compassion and mercy? Work on the obsessions and superstitions she held in her pixillated state? Tell her he'd seen the candle in his dreams?

No, no, no . . . Compassion, mercy, hallicination . . . Tools to use. But would they get him in the door?

He flung himself to a sitting position on the edge of his lumpy bed, hands clenched between his knees, his wiry body rocking under the intensity of his thoughts.

Why had he, as Guthrie Linyard, deserted her at the altar thirty years ago?

Cool it now. Get the ducks all in a row. In the first place, everything told to her thirty years ago was a lie. He had not cut out because her father had threatened to disinherit her while offering him fifty thousand dollars.

He had stranded her at the altar because . . .

Hmmmm. A simple explanation, that's all that was needed. A simple, sympathetic explanation.

Getting rid of the onus of a fifty thou bribe shouldn't be too difficult. Just say that her father had made the threat and the offer, and he'd laughed in her father's face. She could have been a pauper like the little match girl, for all he cared about her money.

So it's thirty years ago and she's standing in her white satin, a bridal bouquet in her trembling hands while a church full of people begins rustling, looking for the groom.

Trouble is, her father has resorted to a last desperate measure — and two big yeggs have walked into the ante-room, nicked the groom-to-be with a medical syringe full of drugs, and are carrying the hapless unconscious Guthrie out the side door.

The groom regains consciousness in a motel in a distant state. Yeggs still present. Then, at that point, father's fifty thou is stuffed into his pocket and the groom warned never to return.

Nuts, thinks the groom. Fifty million wouldn't be enough. When the yeggs at last depart, the groom tries to phone the love of his life. He cannot get a call through to her. He comes back, to the palatial home on Vanderling Boulevard. He learns a tragic truth. Atha, his darling Atha, is sealed away in a private mental hospital. Lost to him forever.

He never wants to see the house on Vanderling Boulevard again.

The groom has gone to the west coast to try and find a life for himself. He has married, never had children, and not once has he held his wife in his arms without aching with the thought of Atha. His wife has died. Couple years ago? Or a year? Why not a few months back? Yes, a few months would be better. Growing emptily old, he has at last returned, goaded by the need to find out what happened to the only woman he ever really loved.

Marley leaped to his feet. It was a bit soapy. But it could have happened. It offered the images he wanted to transmit to her, and don't forget . . . believing in Guthrie's return she's burned a candle nightly for thirty years . . .

SHE ANSWERED THE MUTED FRONT DOOR CHIMES HERSELF. And Marley felt a slight chill. The old face was a dead white collection of sharp angular bones and wrinkles. And the garment she wore . . . it was not a nightgown after all. It was a white satin wedding dress.

She was limned in a pale lighting of the enormous, vaulted entry foyer. Marley felt the darkness over the lawn behind him like a weight against his back.

"Yes?" she asked.

Marley's gaze flicked toward the right, toward the window where the candle glowed. He took heart from the wealth exuded by the house.

"Atha," he murmured, "don't you remember? Don't you recognize me?"

She leaned, peering at him closely.

"Atha, surely you remember . . . the breeze in our faces when I took you sailing . . . that lovely emerald green gown you wore to the hospital benefit . . . the way we danced the night the Leyer orchestra kept playing Sunrise Serenade for us?"

A small flicker showed in her sunken eyes. "Guthrie?"

"Yes, Atha, oh, yes!" Marley said fervently.

"Guthrie?" she repeated, like a child whispering in an empty room. "Can it really be Guthrie?"

"Of course, Atha." He reached and took her bony hands in his. "And I can explain everything, my darling. Let me in. Let me fill my eyes with the sight of you. Let me tell you what really happened."

A small seizure went through her. Her hands locked tightly on his. "Guthrie . . . Guthrie . . . Guthrie . . ." she whispered.

She drew him inside, not taking her eyes from his face. Across the entry foyer, down two steps into a vast sunken livingroom where the candle burned on a table set close to the front windows.

"Atha, it's so . . ."

"Please," she said. "Not now." She stepped back, looking him up and down.

"Atha . . ." a strange feeling of alarm began pouring through Marley.

"No," she said, turning away. "You mustn't say a word." She braced herself against a small, drop leaf desk. "Not another lying word."

Her hand dipped into the desk drawer and drew out a gun. She pointed it steadily at Marley.

"I always knew the lure of the money would bring you back someday," she said.

"Atha, no! Wait . . . You've got it all wrong!"

"And this," she said, "is the only thing that's kept me alive for thirty years."

She squeezed the trigger, and Marley died painlessly, a bullet between his eyes at such short range. He crumpled and fell.

Her whole body seeming to lift in a long-lost self respect and pride, Atha Vanderling quietly, a rustling of white satin, stepped across the prone form, reached out her hand, and pinched the flame from the candle.

Continued from page 66 MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

From HAL ELLSON (*Salami on Rye*) comes the following mini-autobiography:

Born Brooklyn 1910. One wife, one daughter, four grandchildren, one dog, two cats and 17 published novels, plus one book of shorts. One movie (in France), directed by Marcel Carne from the novel TOMBOY which has sold four-million copies in paperback. Wrote the novel GAMES from the motion picture GAMES and almost expired, as I was working a fulltime difficult job while contracted to do the novel within a month. Published about 250 shorts, with many translations. Twice in BEST DETECTIVE STORIES. Have been doing sculpture and experimental gardening for past 40 years. In consequence of the above — no rest for the wicked.

Continued on page 123

The trouble was, Rick's work brought him into contact with other women. It was strictly business, he told her, and Iris believed him. But if he ever did anything with one of them, she'd kill him!

Faithful Unto Death

by PETER MAGNUS

IRIS HAD A MENTAL SNAPSHOT OF HERSELF, cat-faced and milky skinned, cowering under the solid disc of shade cast by the beach umbrella, like a leopard in cover.

It had been a bad move to come here. Ultraviolet did terrible things to her. The glare from talcum sand and a cobalt sea that turned colorless in direct sunlight and started flashing like broken glass, gave Iris headaches.

Some leopard, she thought immediately. *No claws*. Her nails were bitten so thoroughly that for a day Iris had been tormenting stubborn, wincing crescents of tissue.

She was a city creature, not a beach person. Rick knew that; one of their first dates had been a disaster, when she fainted and then turned delirious during a few hours at Fire Island.

But then Rick could be very selfish. Disloyalty made her whine and shake her head. Not selfish as much as childish. He made money for the sake of spending it and you could spend a lot without even trying, flying to Panama on an impulse vacation.

Iris sighed and shrugged and pushed the dark glasses back up the bridge of her cute, perspiring little nose. Patches of bad road and all, marriage to Rick had been anything but dull. And she did love him.

Too much for her own and maybe his good.

WHICH BROUGHT HER BACK TO JEALOUSY. She gave up pretending to read the paperback, planted elbows on knees and chin on hands. Rick might accept that she was insecure and possessive to an alarming degree, the point of mental illness, but that didn't help *her*.

Forget it . . .

Yet she couldn't. Even now she was checking to see that he was still swimming, safely insulated from anyone else. This resort was full of women, girls, flaunting themselves simply by sitting in the sun. Forced to wear a long-sleeved blouse and pants, Iris felt both superior and envious of them.

The trouble being that Rick's work brought him into contact with women, all the time. Sure, she believed him, it was strictly business. But there was such a thing as Russian roulette, a candle flame and a moth. Hard not to wonder whether the next casual, strictly-business relationship might turn into something different.

There'd been an explosion over that, just before they had come here. The dowdy little widow at Trappers Falls. Iris shook her head again, groaning with shame and frustration. Crazy to even dream that lithe, tanned Rick could see anything from a dumpy matron old enough to be . . . well, his much older sister if not quite his mother.

But Iris had lost control, there in the cramped motel room where the air-conditioner keened and rattled, picking at her nerves while she waited, waited, seeing without watching TV, hearing though failing to listen to the radio. They played a lot of country music in those parts.

"You do anything with that bitch, I'll kill you," Iris told him. Gullet burning, gasping so hard that the words were warped.

Rick's eyes wide and blank, moisture shining on his fine-cut, startl-

ingly pink lower lip. "Hey! People don't kill people, Rabbit. Well, do they?" He sounded so startled, indignant, that silence grew in a bubble between them until they both burst it with laughter that went on and on, hurting their ribs.

It wasn't that funny but he'd been able to make her giggle for days afterwards, by reminding Iris of his reaction.

THAT WAS THEN AND NOW IS NOW, SHE MUSED. Hating herself for lack of faith yet unable to prevent it.

Rick was coming out of the water. Chest thrust forward, washboard stomach sucked in as he stretched, palming wetness off butter-colored hair. He turned a cartwheel, lost balance, and rolled on a shoulder to find his feet again. A lucky mortal unable to do anything ungracefully.

Skilful as a sniper, Iris surveyed the beach. And yes, Maybe he hadn't seen her. Maybe she wasn't looking at him.

Iris willed her husband to stop showing off. He ambled up the gently rising sand and dropped beside her. "Rabbit, if only you'd *swim*." She didn't answer and Rick was hardly aware of having said it; just a remark he made whenever they were within miles of the sea.

To Iris, swimming and drowning were twinned and twined. She shivered, smiling mechanically to cover the movement and make it an aimless shrug. Over Rick's sleekly wet head she was watching the other woman.

The Kraut Widow might not be German but she was spectacularly Nordic: rain-straight hair so fair that it looked white, eyes so intensely blue they seemed almost freakish. And she might not be a widow. In a place of couples, married and otherwise, she was placidly, arrogantly, self-sufficiently solo.

Rick sighed impatiently, laying a finger alongside Iris's sharp chin and forcing her attention away from the woman. "I've never even spoken to her, Rabbit."

"Body language," Iris replied bleakly. "You show up, and that bitch *quivers*. I've got eyes."

"Too bad you can't see straight, then." Rick regretted the sharpness, forced a grin, and pulled Iris up from the cane lounge. "Let's eat."

AT DINNER, THE KRAUT WIDOW WAS ONLY THREE TABLES away. Covered from neck to knee in a cloudy, billowing dress that hinted at more nakedness than she had displayed on the beach. Her hair was luminous in the candlelight.

"Have you been taking your sleeping pills?" Rick asked, apropos

of nothing.

Iris nodded a lie. She'd been expecting that.

Naturally she only pretended to take the capsule after their bedtime routine of backgammon and a desultory, joking survey of the day's events.

But Iris slept soundly, until roused well after midnight when a plane roared low overhead — a latecomer using the hotel's private strip.

For a while she lay looking at palm fronds dancing in the slightly lighter oblong of window at the foot of the bed. A living kaleidoscope activated by the night breeze, patterns recurring hypnotically but never quite the same.

Reaching out in the darkness, she found Rick's bed empty and cool.

He was, she told herself emptily, a cunning if not a clever man. It would do no good to accuse him of flirting, seducing the Kraut Widow, under her nose. As Rick had pointed out, he'd never approached the woman, before witnesses.

Iris kept looking at the palms, and waiting. The place was quiet, except for the small symphonies of the night — palm fronds whispering dryly among themselves, the steady, broken-glass-cascading background of crickets, the lulling rhythms of the sea.

The main hotel building was simply a place where one checked in, ate, drank and danced. Guests had individual, thatched-hut bedrooms radiating spoke fashion from the central hub.

Convenient, Iris reflected, for visiting . . . And all the rest.

SHE AND RICK HAD HEARD MUCH TALK among the other guests, of skinny-dipping after dark, moonlight excursions generally made in pairs or foursomes.

"That's dumb," Rick commented bluntly. "The lifeguards aren't around after sunset and that's some kind of current, just past the headland." Iris was eavesdropping as he chatted to a fat, sweaty man in Bermuda shorts who talked a lot and laughed even more. The oaf had nudged Rick.

"Well, when I said *swimming*, that was just . . . like, a manner of speaking, Sport. Their bathing suits never get wet, huh? Those that wear 'em!"

"I'm married, and happy with it," Rick snapped back. But that, Iris felt fairly sure, was for her benefit. He had an uncanny flair for sensing when she was listening. Certainly he'd been thoughtful as he loped over to join her.

Testing him, she asked, "What was he saying?"

"A load of bull, same as ever." Rick smiled absently, warm fingers cupping her elbow.

The palm trees kept drawing, erasing, drawing their patterns and Iris found that she was grinding her teeth. She knew why Rick wasn't in the room.

Nobody else would believe her; apparently, Rick and the Kraut Widow were oblivious to each other and it might even be true that they had exchanged no conversation. Not in public, anyway.

But as certainly as if she had been told, Iris knew that he was with that woman, now. She could see them in her head — right down to the gold chain round the Kraut Widow's lithe, chocolate-brown waist, sliding tantalizingly on satin skin as it emphasized her slenderness.

The palm patterns vanished momentarily. Iris shut her eyes, all but a slit, and breathed regularly. Rick was back, clambering through the window and inching it shut. Her vision had long since adjusted to the gloom: sickly, she noted that he was barefoot, that his hair was wet again, and rumped.

Worst of all, he exuded triumph, a gloating quality explicit in his movements.

HE WAS LOOKING DOWN AT HER, SUCKING A SCRATCH on the back of his hand. "You didn't take the pill," he accused. Iris fought a hysterical urge to giggle, and sat up.

"No. I might have, if you hadn't kept nagging me to."

Rick shrugged and wagged his head in wry defeat. "You don't change, Rabbit. How many times has it been since we teamed up? And you never believe me."

She could think of nothing to say. Rick's right hand came out of the pocket of his sodden jeans, pouring a gold snake into his other hand. "You'd better wear this under your clothes, when we go home. There's some rings, too. Put them in your cold cream jar and don't forget to smooth the surface, same as always."

He sat on the edge of the bed, examining the scratch. "It'll be healed by tomorrow," he muttered.

Iris flung her arms round him. Mistaking her joy, Rick said, "Hey, that stuff isn't worth a fortune, darling. It'll pay the rent for a month or so, buy groceries. I could have swung by her room on the way back, but somebody might notice if her money was missing. No sense in being greedy."

His wife wasn't listening. Thank God, she thought, that Rick hadn't been lying, after all. All he'd wanted to do was what he did so well — kill the woman.

Last time he shot too small. This time it was a thirty thousand dollar Porsche and two hundred bucks from the owner and a fast joyride to some other part of the country. One thing he didn't need was a couple of backseat drivers!

Personality Conflict

by GARY ALEXANDER

CHECK OUT THAT BLACK-HAIRED RUBE WHO JUST CAME IN the side door, the one at the bar scarfing down a martini. If he ain't one of them A-rab oil sheiks, I'm Franklin Deleanor Roosevelt.

Why must you continually describe people in ethnic terms? And your observation is irrevelant to anything, although I will admit that he projects a confident aura that may stem from OPEC affluence.

You and your fancy talk. Look at them threads. So he don't have a turban. That three-piecer must've set him back five hundred.

Again irrevelant. Typically mindless speculation.

What you call your irrevelant is parked out in the back lot. He didn't even leave it under a light. The key's probably in the ignition, too. When you're that flush, I guess you just don't give a diddly-damn. That Porsche is almost new, thirty grand if it cost a penny.

How nice for him, but please, let's redirect the focus of this conversation. As I recall, the last time your mind began turning —

Yeah, yeah, blame it all on me. So was it my fault we only got fifty-four bucks and a watch that didn't tell time? I didn't exactly twist your arm.

Yes, I admit to a moral and intellectual weakness that allows me to be persuaded by your criminal plans. I should think, however, that our three years of incarceration would have tempered your ambitions.

Big deal. We shot too small last time. This won't be no street-corner stick-up. What say we drink up, go out and give this A-rab some personalized parking lot service?

This is ludicrous. We have been released for less than a month. Do you realize how severe the sentence will be with another conviction?

That's only if you get caught. Come on, lighten up. I know this guy who'll carve that thing up like a Thanksgiving turkey and sell the parts out of state. We'd get an easy five grand for a finder's fee.

As attractive as the rewards appear to be, a Turbo Carrera is hardly inconspicuous. We would have the difficulty of transporting it from point A to point B without detection.

No sweat. I'll drive. This thing'll blow away a four-speed Vette.

Why must you persist in involving me in your reckless schemes? Do you enjoy bringing to the surface my self-destructive tendencies?

Because you got moths flying out of your pockets, just like me. Now drink up and let's get moving before this guy decides to take a powder . . . Hey, just like I figured. Keys in the car. Candy from a baby.

Sir, calm down. It is not as it seems. We were merely admiring your automobile. Sir, please keep your voice down. You are creating an unnecessary scene.

Lemme handle this.

Dear God, don't hit him again! He's already down. Stop!

Two hundred lousy bucks on him. Better than nothing, I reckon.

This dalliance is insane. People are watching us from inside the lounge. No doubt, the police have been notified.

Yeah, yeah. Calm down. My guy's shop ain't four miles from here. Saddle up and hang on.

Must you violate every traffic regulation in the books? We're in a proverbial fishbowl as it is.

We ain't going to no Rotary picnic. What we got for the tape deck?

Please pay attention to your driving.

All longhair! Where the hell's the country and western?

Stop throwing them out the window. I swear you're deranged!

Hey, he got hisself a police scanner too.

“ — silver Porsche, southbound on Wendell Boulevard at excessive rate of speed. Suspect is a male caucasian, age thirty to thirty-five. Auto theft and felonious assault. License number, alpha, victor, bravo — ”

What are you turning that off for? We're famous.

And you almost hit that woman in the crosswalk. You are absolutely mad!

YOU GOT THAT RIGHT, MAN. AND YOU'RE NO BARGAIN EITHER. YOU TURKEYS ARE A COUPLE OF SPACE CASES.

Where the hell did you come from?

PULL THIS MACHINE OVER BEFORE YOU SNUFF US ALL, MAN. AND THIS JUMP SEAT BACK HERE ISN'T ALL THAT COMFORTABLE.

Sit back and shut up if you want to keep your face, whoever you are.

YOU KNOW WHO I AM. I'VE BEEN TRYING TO KEEP YOU BIMBOS OUT OF TROUBLE ALL MY LIFE.

Our uninvited passenger is making some logical points.

Both of you shut up! Yeah, now I remember you. All I need now is two little old ladies on my back. Soon as I shake this black-and-white on my tail, fat city.

YOU THINK YOU'RE AT DAYTONA, MAN? WE'RE DOING OVER SEVENTY AND WE'VE TRAFFIC COMING AT US EVERY WHICH WAY. SHUT THIS HUMMER DOWN AND WE'LL MAKE A RUN FOR IT. TAKE OUR CHANCES WITH THE PIGS. BAD KARMA, MAN.

Very perceptive. Listen to him. I beg you!

Put a lid on it, creeps. Hey, this thing handles! Swerved around that van flatfooted.

WE'RE GOING TO GET BUSTED ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, MAN, AND NO WAY AM I GOING BACK INTO A CAGE. THREE LONG YEARS. LIKE, IT DEVoured MY INSIDES, ONE CELL AT A TIME. HIT THE BINDERS, MAN. WE'LL HOP OUT AND SPLIT.

The gentlemen makes sense. Consolidation of losses, if you will.

You wimps are asking for fistburgers after we get there. I got my foot in the firewall. Two minutes and we're home free.

RED FLASHERS THREE BLOCKS AHEAD, MAN. THEY'VE GOT US WRAPPED. WE'RE TALKING TWENTY YEARS IN THE SLAM, AND THAT'S ONLY IF THE GUY LIVES. WHEN I GOT OUT, I'D BE A BOWL OF GELATIN. HATE TO DO IT, BUT THIS IS THE BEST CHOICE.

Let loose of the wheel, creep!

“ — crossed the centerline on the 9800 block of Wendell Boulevard. Head-on collision with tanker truck. No injuries to truck driver reported. Suspect, lone occupant of stolen Porsche, DOA at — ”

It was a quiet, rainy night until the stranger came into the place and ordered a sandwich — with maybe a side order of murder!

Salami on Rye

by HAL ELLSON

RAIN SLID DOWN THE PLATE GLASS WINDOW and pattered on the step beyond the screen-door. The avenue yawned emptily outside. Sam shook his head and groaned. It was a bad night for business. In the past two hours not a customer had come through the door. Knishes and frankfurters shriveled on the hot-plate in the window; bread staled in the bins. At thought of the waste he groaned again and returned to the kitchen.

"Go home," he said to the Chinese dishwasher. "Go home and sleep. Nobody's buying."

The dishwasher left, and Sam remained, hoping the rain would stop. At midnight it was falling with renewed fury. Wind sprayed it through the screen-door. Sam shrugged. Without an umbrella there was no question of his leaving early. As for customers? *Tomorrow*, he thought. *They'll come tomorrow, if it don't rain cats and dogs.*

Again he started for the kitchen and turned. A car stopped outside, its door slammed, rapid steps sounded on the sidewalk; then a shadow-figure crossed the grey blue of the window and paused behind the

screen-door, still unfocused. A moment later a man stepped into the shop and stamped his feet. It was a welcome sound. Sam beamed and said, "A wet night, no? But better for ducks."

It was hardly the thing to say. The customer regarded his dampened clothes with a look of dismay, glanced sharply around the empty store, then looked at the mute-faced clock on the back wall and went to a table. Sam quickly appraised him, seeing him as another midnight eccentric disgruntled with life and seeking to appease other hungers with food. *A creep*, he thought, but creep or not, he was welcome company. "What'll you have?" asked Sam.

"Salami on rye, and a glass of beer."

"The beer comes in bottles after midnight," Sam explained, and the customer looked up, his face pale, small black button-eyes welling indignation, but he had to concede. "Make it a bottle," he said.

"Rheingold? Pabst . . . ?"

"Anything."

Creep. A real creep. Salami on rye, big deal, Sam thought, and moved away. He came back with the sandwich, sliced pickle, a bottle and a glass. Seeking to appease a hunger of his own, he couldn't resist speaking. "Think the rain'll let up?" he said.

"Who cares?" the creep replied, turning the bottle into the glass without looking up.

ON THAT SOUR NOTE, SAM WENT BACK behind the counter with a dimmer view of mankind. The wild fury of the rain beating on the window didn't help, nor the rigid black hands of the clock on the back wall pointing the hour. It was a quarter-past twelve, and all respectable citizens were abed.

"Another beer!" the customer bawled out.

Sam bridled at the order. *Look, I'm the proprietor of this establishment*, he wanted to shout, and couldn't articulate his anger. Promptly he brought another bottle. *Something else, your Majesty*, he was about to add, and couldn't bring off the sarcasm.

"Got tonight's paper?" the man said.

Newspapers are not on the menu, Sam wanted to say. The gall of the request demanded some such reply, but what was the use? Sam shrugged. "I'll see. I'll see," he said and brought back the day's paper. It was accepted without thanks and opened. The customer buried his face in it.

"Creep. A genuine creep," Sam muttered to himself and retired behind the counter. *A library I should open*, he thought, and glanced at the clock. It was twenty-past twelve, but time had suddenly become

a depressing ambiguity. It was the night of the creep; the hour when slobs and cantankerous customers prevailed. Savagely, Sam hacked a slice of salami for himself, picked it up. The screen-door burst open, bringing a squall of wind, a spatter of rain and a fat dimple-cheeked stranger.

Another creep? Sam dropped the salami, wiped his hands on his apron and came alert, ready for more sarcasms, but the fatman beamed, his wet cheeks glistened, blue eyes danced. "Who turned on the shower?" he laughed, releasing the warmth that had congealed in Sam.

"Don't blame it on me," he answered. "I'm a businessman."

"Ah, I know what you mean. Not a soul in the streets. Bad for business, but good for the farmers."

"Who's a farmer? Who grows cabbage?" Sam shrugged. "What'll it be?"

"Make it twenty hot pastramis."

"There must be a party at the house."

"You might call it that," the fat one said, and Sam set to work while the conversation continued.

In no time at all the sandwiches were cut, wrapped, bagged, slices of pickle and cones of mustard added. Smiling, he pushed the bag toward the edge of the counter, and the fat man leaned forward. "Go in the toilet," he said softly.

"Who has to go?" answered Sam, thinking the request a joke.

"Look, go in," the fat man said. The dimples were gone, his laughing blue eyes two grey slits of ice.

Something was wrong. The humor had ended, but Sam choose to cling to the aura of warmth the fat one had brought. "But I don't have to go," he said with a fading smile. In the next moment it vanished completely and terror constricted him. The fat man's hand slid inside his coat, and out it came with a gun.

"Now do what I said — and don't come out or I'll blow your goddam head off," he warned.

SAM OBLIGED AND, WITH ICY CALM, THE FAT ONE made his way to the back of the counter, emptied the cash register, came round to the front and eyed the customer at the table whose face was still buried in the newspaper. "Hey, you," he said, but the one at the table didn't look up. The fat man frowned and raised his voice. "Hey, stupid. I'm talking to you."

The paper dropped slightly. Two small black-button eyes appeared above it, glaring with indignation. "Were you addressing me?" the

man said.

The fat man almost smiled; his lips curled and suddenly pursed tight. "Move, Mister. Get in the toilet and make it fast."

The newspaper dropped, and the fat man blanched. A gun was pointing at him. "Don't move," said the one at the table. He rose from his chair and came forward, took the gun from the fat man and pocketed it quickly. "Now let's have the money you took from the cash register, chubby," he grinned.

As the fat man gave it over, Sam burst forth from the lavatory and faced his rescuer, trembling with excitement. *Ah, how I misjudged you*, he thought, and cried, "Thanks, Mister! Thanks a million!"

"Thanks for what?" said the one with the gun.

"For everything, my friend. To think, if you hadn't been here. Ah, but I'm talking too much. Hold that crook. Hold him while I call the police."

He turned, started for the phone booth, and the one with the gun stopped him in his tracks.

"Don't touch that phone!"

Stunned, Sam swung around. "What did you say?" he asked.

"You heard me. Both of you get in the toilet, and don't come out or I'll blow your heads off."

THEY WENT, THE FAT ONE A BLOB OF PALE JELLY, while Sam was devastated. The rain, a few dollars earned in a long day of sweat and blood was going to that little creep out there, a salami on rye big-shot.

His blood racing, Sam stepped out of the lavatory, a thoroughly roused avenging angel. The creep was counting his loot, a tough-guy with a gun, but Sam was armed with a more lethal weapon, two in fact, righteous anger and a three-foot-long salami that he picked up from the counter. He swung it like a club, and down and out went the creep.

"Salami on rye, hey?" crowed Sam over his prostrate victim.

The thud of the hold-up man meeting the floor, or possibly Sam's exultant cry, induced the fat man to venture forth from the lavatory. The twenty hot pastramis he'd ordered were wasting on the counter. It was enough to rouse the avenging angel in Sam once more, and down came the salami on the fat one's skull. He collapsed like a machine-gunned balloon, and Sam marched to the phone-booth. A grin on his face, he rang the local precinct-house.

"I want to report an attempted holdup," he gloated. "I have the prisoners, two creeps. Will you kindly pick them up?"

Sunday in the suburbs can be deadly dull. What to do? Why not plan a murder. Just for fun. Certainly not with any intention of actually following through on it!

Deadly Sunday

by E.L. KNOUSE

IT WAS A DREARY, DRIZZLY SUNDAY AFTERNOON in suburban Maryland, and Lucy was bored. She had read the paper, and finished the last crossword puzzle in the magazine she had bought last Tuesday. "There's absolutely nothing worth doing," she muttered, gazing morosely at the narrow, fenced yard of the townhouse she lived in with her sister. Suddenly a smile lifted the corners of her slim, well shaped lips, crept upward across the contours of her prominent cheekbones, and softly illuminated her light blue eyes.

"I'll plan a murder," she whispered, savoring each word carefully. "I'll plan a perfect murder. A murder that no one will ever solve." It was easy to decide whose murder she would plan. Her sister, Linda, was the only person who existed in her world since Lucy's release from the rest home three and a half months ago.

Twenty-seven-year-old Linda dozed restlessly in her room upstairs. Her restlessness was not caused by any concern for plots against her life; it was caused by worry and overwork. Linda had led a difficult life since her parents and her fifteen-year-old brother had died two and a half years ago in a fire that destroyed their home. Then seventeen-year-old Lucy, the only survivor of the blaze, had a nervous breakdown, and her illness consumed a large part of the money their parents had left.

Linda's body jerked suddenly and she was fully awake. Raven-haired and blue-eyed, Linda had always been the beauty in the family, just as mousy looking Lucy had been the brains. Not that either attribute had done much for its possessor. Lucy and her brains fell apart at the first sign of stress, and Linda had made only a small splash in the world of glamour. She now worked as a modestly paid model for a local agency.

"Lucy" she muttered. "Why do I always have to take care of Lucy? Ever since she was born I've had to baby-sit with her, look after her, be a good example to her. Now I have to support her and I barely have enough to keep myself going."

Tears filled her eyes as she thought of the promises and dreams that life had once offered. They were all gone now. Linda was too much of a realist to believe that anything glamorous or exciting would happen to her. She would continue to plod through life forever, with her sister tied like a millstone around her neck.

Linda was wrong.

Lucy sat at the kitchen table writing industriously. Her long, thin fingers clutched the pencil convulsively, and moved it across the paper in sudden spurts. Occasionally a childish giggle erupted, and sometimes a frown furrowed her face, making it look plain and unattractive.

Lucy could have been a beautiful girl, but her beauty was of classic bones and well spaced features. It needed to be cultivated and displayed with confidence. No one had noticed it when she was little so it passed into permanent obscurity, overshadowed by the vibrant colors and natural magnetism of her older sister.

"No! No! No!" She struck impatiently at the paper. "Anyone could see through that. It wouldn't fool a three year old, much less a policeman. You're not showing a proper understanding of the victim, Lucy."

That's the whole secret of committing a perfect murder. Understanding the victim."

Lucy started thinking seriously about her sister. The first thing she could remember was one summer day when she was almost five years old. Thirteen-year-old Linda had been entertaining one of her boy-friends in the backyard of their Bethesda home. They were sitting on the swing together, and Lucy crept under the willow tree to see them better. The boy (she couldn't remember his name) had his arm around Linda, and suddenly he leaned over and kissed her right on the lips. Lucy felt like swooning, but Linda just sat there looking cool, and remote.

"You're so beautiful, Linda," the boy gasped.

Linda nodded her head in acknowledgement and smiled faintly.

LUCY THOUGHT NOW WONDERFUL IT MUST BE to have everyone love and admire you. She'd have given anything to be cuddled and petted the way her sister was, but she knew even then that no one would ever feel that way about her. Everyone talked about her brains, but they were cold consolation for beauty.

Memories started flooding back to her. Linda going to parties, boys and girls hanging around the house, basking in the reflected glory of Linda's beauty. Mother and Dad always fussing over her, buying her beautiful clothes, admiring her.

Lucy watched it all as a bystander. Oh, she got her share of attention too. Her parents were always urging her to study, to polish up her brilliant mind. Someday she would be a genius and they would all be proud of her. She remembered all the lonely hours spent at the desk in her room, and how she had hated it. How she wanted to join in the fun that vibrated around Linda.

There was her brother, Stan, two years younger than she, but he didn't count. He was a boy, and that put him in a category all by himself. It was only Linda who counted. Linda, who entered her first beauty contest at the age of sixteen, and won of course, and kept winning until she was eighteen and went to New York to become a famous model.

Life had seemed dull and colorless after she left. There was nothing but the books she had to study. She loved to read novels and imagine herself leading the lives of all those exciting people, dreamed for hours of her place in their adventurous lives. But her parents and her teachers were always nagging her, urging "use your brains, Lucy. Work harder in school so we'll all be proud of you."

Two years later Linda came back and bought this townhouse in

Rockville. She never talked about the time she had been away, but it was easy to guess that things hadn't gone well. She was reserved, and a little cynical. She had been modeling in the Washington area for seven years now, and around six months ago she had started going to secretarial school at night.

"Guess she'll be too old to model before long," Lucy decided aloud. "Looks like things didn't turn out so great for her after all."

Lucy started writing again.

Linda came into the kitchen and put some water on for coffee. "What are you working at so busily?"

"I'm plotting a murder," Lucy answered calmly, sitting back and flexing her fingers. "A perfect murder that no one can solve."

Linda looked startled. "Who has the honor of being the victim? Anyone we know?"

"You, of course. I don't know anyone else well enough to kill them."

"How sweet of you, dear, but would you mind terribly if I declined the honor?"

Lucy looked at her gravely, then returned to her writing. Every now and then a smile quirked the corners of her lips.

Linda fixed her coffee and settled comfortably in the living room, feet propped up on a hassock, the fashion section of the New York Times on her lap. She didn't read the paper though; her eyes stared idly across the narrow room, through the window, and into the yard. Once in a while the lids lowered, sweeping long, dark lashes against her cheek. She really didn't see the rain, or the soggy clumps of autumn leaves that huddled forlornly. She didn't see the dull oppressive sky, or the stark branches with their warning of winter's imminent arrival. Her eyes looked outward, but her gaze was inward, examining feelings and emotions, seeking answers to the many questions that troubled her.

Lucy burst into the room. "I've done it! Listen, and tell me what you think."

Linda returned slowly from her internal reflections. "You've . . . done it? What have you done, Lucy?"

"Figured out the perfect way to murder you. I could kill you around half an hour before Tommy comes to pick you up tonight. It doesn't really matter how, let's say I stab you with the carving knife, then I leave the door unlocked and your body lying on the foyer floor. Then I'd jump out my bedroom window, being careful to land so I broke a leg or an arm, something like that. Tommy would find me moaning out there, and I'd tell him how someone came to the door and when you opened it he forced his way in and killed you. I was so terrified I ran

upstairs and jumped out the window. How does that sound?"

"Terrible. It's hardly likely that someone would come in here, head right for the kitchen and grab one of our knives and kill me with it. It's even more unlikely that I'd open the door without knowing who's there, and Tommy knows it."

"Well you could have thought it was Tommy," Lucy said defensively.

"I never let him in without asking who it is. As for your plans to jump out the window, I doubt that you could land that accurately from the second floor. You'd probably manage to kill yourself. I think you'd best work out a better plan than that."

"All right, I will!" Lucy stormed into the kitchen again. "I'll think up something really great that even *you* can't find fault with."

LINDA RESUMED HER REVERIE, starting with a few thoughts about Tommy. She had been seeing him for just under a year now. He was married, and she knew that there was no future in their relationship, but he was pleasant company. Her evenings with him were all she had to look forward to these days. Before Lucy moved in with her, he used to come by to visit two or three times a week. Now he only came one Sunday a month, and they went out in the car for awhile. Someday he would stop coming at all; already he was showing signs of boredom with the present arrangement. Another example of Lucy's interference with her life.

She started thinking about Lucy's sudden interest in murdering her, and wondered what it meant. Dr. Santiley had said that it would be a good sign if she showed an interest in something, but planning a crime hardly seemed to qualify as a proper interest. It didn't worry her; she knew that Lucy wasn't violent. Lucy had always lived in the world of the mind, never got physically involved in anything. That was probably why she had a breakdown, always thinking and brooding instead of doing something. She thought of all the years stretching ahead with Lucy clinging to her, always in the way, driving her deeper and deeper into debt.

Linda thought all the way back to the beginning, back to where it all started. How well she remembered that day when her parents brought Lucy home from the hospital. She was eight years old, and well established as the beautiful, pampered darling of the household. Everything centered around her, and she thought that was how it should be. Then her mother went to the hospital, and her father came home that night and told her she had a baby sister.

"You'll just love her, Linda dear" he told her. "You can help

Mommy take care of her. Your little sister is going to be very smart, just like you've always been very beautiful."

Linda thought about her new sister a lot in the next few days and sometimes she was happy about her and sometimes she was worried. What would it be like having someone who was very smart around? Was it better to be smart than beautiful? Did you get more attention? Maybe she should try being smart too; she was sure she could be. It was just that nobody had ever expected her to be. She was just expected to be beautiful.

When Linda first saw Lucy she was very disappointed. She even felt a little sorry for her. Lucy wasn't smart, and she certainly wasn't pretty; she was just nothing. Her pity soon turned to animosity however. Her mother was always fussing and crooning over the useless infant. Even her father would sit the baby on his lap and talk to her as if she could understand him. It was disgusting.

Linda started working harder on her appearance, determined to regain her place as the star of the family. She had just started to succeed when calamity struck again. Her mother went back to the hospital and had another baby, a boy. This was even worse than before, because apparently being a boy was more important than anything else. You didn't have to be smart or beautiful or anything if you were a boy.

Linda worked even harder on her big asset, and eventually it started to pay off. Her parents paid more attention to her, the two little ones started following her around with admiration, and she was discovered by Boys with a capital B. Once again she was the center of attention; everything revolved around her. Then came the beauty contests that she won so easily. When she left home to go to New York, she expected that the whole world would soon be at her feet.

How shocked she was to discover that no one thought she was remarkable at all. Oh, she got a few jobs modeling for wholesale houses, and a few boys were interested in her, some of them photographers who promised jobs but never delivered them. Then there was the agent who promised her a job in a Broadway show, and when he was tired of her said, "You stupid bitches are all alike, thinking the world owes you something for the way you look. You're not worth nearly as much as a good whore."

Finally there was the rich playboy who swept her off her feet, promised her the earth, the moon, and the stars, then paid her ten thousand dollars to get lost before his wife came back to town.

Bitter, defeated, and heartbroken she had crawled back to Maryland. But she was unable to accept the final humiliation of moving back

into her parents' house, and used her pay off money to make a down payment on a place of her own. As the years passed, she learned to accept the limitations of her life, like someone who is missing a limb learns to live with the deficiency. Until Lucy was dumped on her. The strain on her meager resources was more than she could bear. Soon she would be too old to work as a model and would end up as someone's secretary for the rest of her life. All to support Lucy, brilliant useless Lucy.

"THIS TIME ITS REALLY PERFECT!" LUCY EXCLAIMED enthusiastically. "I've plotted the perfect crime."

Linda glared at her. "I don't give a damn about your paltry, juvenile schemes. Why don't you apply your great and noble mind to something worthwhile like making dinner? I'm sick and tired of playing nursemaid to you."

Tears welled up in Lucy's pale eyes as she looked pitifully at her sister. Her hand fluttered weakly up to her mouth, then pressed hard against her lips, pushing them painfully against her teeth. They stared at each other mutely for several minutes, naked emotions rising to the surface for the first time in their lives, erupting from their thin protective shields, hanging dangerously in the air between them.

Lucy dropped the papers she held, turned and bolted up the stairs, down the hall, and slammed the door of her room behind her.

Linda sat very still for a short time, then picked up the papers. She read them briefly, hesitated a moment, and tore them in half, in quarters, into tiny shreds. She walked into the powder room and flushed them down the toilet. "Trash. Nothing but trash." She washed her hands thoroughly, dried them, went across the hall into the kitchen, and put some leftover stew on the stove to heat. When it was ready, she fixed two plates, opened the door of the cabinet where medicines were kept and took down the bottle of Lucy's sleeping pills. She emptied five capsules onto one of the plates, mixed it carefully, and set the two plates on the table.

"Lucy," she called up the stairs, "Come down right away. Dinner's on the table."

Lucy was so used to obeying her sister that she came, even though she didn't want to. She sat in her chair and picked unhappily at the food in front of her.

"I'm sorry, Lucy. I didn't mean what I said. It's just this miserable Sunday getting me down. I hate days like this."

Lucy looked at her pleadingly. "Is it really all right? You aren't really tired of my being here?"

"Of course not." Linda laughed. "Why I'd be terribly lonesome if you weren't here to keep me company. Now eat your stew before it gets cold. You always tell me I make the best stew in the world, do don't disappoint me."

Lucy ate happily. "It's delicious, Linda. Absolutely delicious." She finished the last bite and wiped the plate clean with a piece of bread. "You go ahead and get dressed for your date, Linda. I'll do the dishes tonight."

"Thanks, Lucy. I don't have much time." Linda went up to her room, a suite with dressing room and bath, and took a quick shower. She put on a skirt and sweater and applied her makeup with swift, competent strokes. Last she brushed her hair until it fell in glistening sheets about her shoulders. It was six fifty-five and she had thirty-five minutes until Tommy arrived.

She went into Lucy's bathroom and started filling the tub. She looked approvingly around her at the brown walls, gold tile and fixtures, and paintings of nude women. The bathroom had been designed for her boyfriends, and she had never bothered to change it for Lucy.

When the tub was three-quarters full, she turned the faucets off and went downstairs. She walked past Lucy, who was sleeping deeply in the living room, and got the bottle of pills from the kitchen. Then she picked Lucy up; it really wasn't very difficult, as Linda was tall and strong from constant exercise and Lucy was small and frail. She carried the limp body upstairs and laid her gently in the tub, put the bottle of pills in Lucy's hand, and slid her down until her head was submerged, being careful not to bruise her legs as they touched the spigot.

Linda watched as the bubbles gurgled up, waited patiently until they stopped. "You were always too clever to see the simple solution, Lucy. It's always best to keep things simple." When there was no sign of life left, she went to the phone in her room and dialed 911.

THE POLICE ARRIVED QUICKLY and were kind and attentive to the beautiful grief-stricken lady. Tommy arrived and stayed until one o'clock to comfort her. It was almost like the old days with everyone fussing over her. She was heartbroken that despite all her efforts her dear sister Lucy had committed suicide.

Linda started going to college in January, majoring in business administration. Everyone was amazed at how well she did, how quickly she learned. Her beauty drew people like a magnet and soon she was the most popular girl on the campus.

Lucy was dead now, and Linda was the smart one in the family, and the beautiful one, and the only one who counted. ●

Artemis could see things before they happened. And now he had the chance to save a man's life. Why wouldn't the man believe him?

Another Close Call

by LENORA K. ROGERS

ARTEMIS IS SITTING AT THE BAR. It is so dark he can hardly see the beer in his glass. It is not the same bar as last week, not even the same part of town. Things are different here, quite different — rose instead of blue, long instead of square. And the bartender is an evil-eyed giant. The glasses will all break if he looks at them in a certain, sinful way.

But one thing is the same: The vision, always the vision — the doomed man sitting alone in a narrow booth and death lurking in the street outside.

His pulse quickens. The old fever returns: Save a life — I can save a human life. His palms sweat and his hands begin to tremble. The decision is at his finger tips. He drums them once on the hard, dark wood and turns on his heel.

The man in the booth looks up at him. He is forty-five or fifty, smooth-skinned, rotund, hair thinning on top.

“Pardon me — its none of my business, you understand — but you’re going to die.”

Raised brows, then a healthy, disbelieving chuckle. “So aren’t we

all, pal?"

Anger covers Artemis like a rash. He clenches his fists but keeps his voice down. "I mean it. If you leave here in the next five minutes, you'll be a dead man — I know it."

"Oh yeah. And how do you know that?" Still smiling, he lights a cigarette.

"I can see things," Artemis explains. "I can see them in my mind before they happen."

The man blows smoke out the corner of his mouth, nods with modest interest. "Psychic, huh?" Then he grins again. "You got a license to practice that voodoo here?" More smoke, more laughter. "And look here, you'll need a crystal ball, too — people in this neighborhood like their fortune-tellers to be real classy, you know what I mean?" Then a funny little wink: "You're crazy, of course, and I pity you like hell, but I'm really enjoying this little interview."

The bartender lumbers up, looms over them wickedly. "Is somebody got a problem here?"

"No. This fella was just telling me a joke, that's all. Weren't you, pal? And anyhow, I was just leaving. How much do I owe you?"

Artemis watches the coins fall into the bartender's thick hand. He hears the parting words spoken. Just as before. Always the same. The inevitable impasse. Nothing to do but follow him.

HE INTERCEPTS THE DOOMED MAN NEAR AN ALLEY and pulls him into it. "Listen to me. Do you see that taxi coming there? It's going to hit you if you cross now. You've got to wait. I saw it all in my mind — you getting run over by a taxi."

"Let — me — go!" The doomed man struggles for his freedom.

"I can't — you'll be dead if I do."

"Let me go!" He is beginning to wrench himself loose.

Artemis, having no choice, flips out his long knife and holds it menacingly against the man's throat.

"You — crazy fool!" the man cries gutturally and gives a convulsive jerk forward.

The knife opens a substantial wound, and the doomed man falls to the pavement.

Artemis stands over him, a little embarrassed but shyly jubilant, too. "That car would've killed you," he mumbles modestly. Behind him the fatal taxi rolls circumspectly by.

And seeing no reason why the man on the pavement should need any money now, Artemis leans down and quietly relieves him of the contents of his wallet.

He was trapped in a shack in the middle of the Australian desert, an innocent bystander. But he knew too much. — so his captors would have to kill him!

OUTBACK

by **JAMES M. REASONER**

MY GOD, THOUGHT ALLEN GARVER AS HE LOOKED AROUND the sleepy little village of Normanton, Queensland, Australia, *it looks just like something out of a John Wayne movie.*

He brought the rented jeep to a stop in front of a long, low building with a verandah that ran its entire length. A faded sign proclaimed it to be Normanton's only hotel and also bore the glad tidings that cold beer was available. After the dusty drive from Cairns, that was good news.

So far, Australia had been a disappointment. As his plane ap-

proached the airport at Sydney, Garver had been struck by the city's resemblance to his native San Francisco. But the airport was all he had seen of Sydney, because after landing, he immediately caught a charter flight for Cairns, further up the coast. One night there in a non-descript hotel and then he had rented the jeep for the journey into the outback. He hadn't seen a single kangaroo, or even a koala bear.

Across the street from the hotel was a two-story building of weathered brick and wood. A balcony ran around the upper floor. This was the Carpentaria Shire Council Hall, the center of the local government. Garver knew he should check in with the authorities there if he was going to go by the book, but he had never been one for red tape. All he wanted to do now was cool off for a little while, then go get the man he was after.

He crossed the verandah of the hotel, grateful for the shade, and opened the screen door. It was cooler inside. Garver felt beads of sweat trickling down out of his sandy hair as he took off the bush hat he had bought in Cairns.

A wooden bar ran down the left side of the room, and round tables took up most of the floor space. There were three men seated at the bar. Garver let his eyes glance over them quickly, wondering if the man he was seeking was among them.

None of the men matched the picture in his pocket. They had the broad, open, sun-baked faces of native Australians, and their rough and functional clothing indicated they lived the hard life of ranchers everywhere.

Garver took in the rest of the room, noting the lean, red-faced man behind the bar and the group of Aborigines clustered around a table in the rear. These darker natives, also dressed in range clothing, were engrossed in a card game.

The red-faced bartender said, "Yes, sir, can I be of help to you?" as Garver stepped up.

"Your sign says cold beer?"

"Yes, sir. The coldest in all Queensland."

"I'll have one. The sun's awfully hot out there."

"Always is, this time of the afternoon," the man replied as he drew a tall glass of beer. When Garver sampled it, he reflected wryly that the Aussies didn't like their beer very cold.

He saw the three men farther down the bar casting furtive looks at him. Tourists were rare in this oven-like plain. The people who lived here probably saw few strangers.

Garver lifted his glass in their direction and said, "To your health, gentlemen."

The Australians raised their own glasses slightly and mumbled rejoinders. Garver stepped off the stool and moved down towards them. He said, "I'd heard how hot the outback is, but I didn't really believe it. Now I do."

One of the men said, "Hot, all right." The others nodded.

"It's not like this where I come from," Garver went on. "I'm from California; San Francisco, to be precise. It gets hot there, but never like this."

Noncommittal grunts.

"My name's Allen Garver. I'm looking for a place called the Edmondson Station. Know anything about it?"

The three shrugged, almost in unison.

Garver considered. He didn't know these three men. They might be friends of the man he was looking for. He went on, "I'm in real estate; I represent a land combine in the States. They're interested in expanding their holdings on an international scale." It was a lie, but it might get him the information he wanted.

"Think someone's living there now," one of the Australians replied. "A Yank like you. He'll never make a go of it, of course."

One of the others said, "Believe there's a swagman back there in that bunch did some work for the Yank. P'raps he can tell you something."

Garver went over the the table and addressed the group of Aborigines. "Do any of you know anything about the Edmondson place? I represent some people who might be interested in buying it."

Mute looks of disinterest and ignorance were his only answer.

He went back to the three men at the bar and said, "I couldn't get anything out of them. Can one of you tell me how to get there?"

"Follow the road southwest out of town. It's about twelve kilometers."

"I'll find it. Thanks."

As Garver walked away, one of the men shook his head and muttered, "Yanks."

Garver paid for the warm beer and went out onto the verandah. He paused and put his hat on, not really wanting to get back out into the glare. As he stood there, he looked down the single street of Norman-ton.

A block away, a girl came out of a store and got into a battered old station wagon. Something about the way she carried herself drew Garver's attention. As he watched, an Aborigine came out from between two buildings and also got into the station wagon. Garver was certain that he had seen the man before, that he had been one of the group in

the bar. And the bar had a back door.

Telling himself that he was being overly suspicious, Garver got into the jeep and started the engine. He saw the station wagon pull away and head southwest.

He let the other vehicle get a good lead before he left.

GARVER PILOTED THE JEEP THROUGH TERRITORY that reminded him of the American Southwest. Most of Australia's population lives in the great curve of the southeastern coast. The harsh, dry interior is fit for little except mining and, in places, sheep ranching. The nearest water was the Gulf of Carpentaria to the north, but it did no good here. It was an area of red dirt, scrubby trees, and heat. A cloud of dust trailed along behind Garver as he drove.

Several miles ahead, he saw the dust that marked the progress of the station wagon. It veered off to the right suddenly, went a short distance, then began to dissipate as the car stopped. Garver wondered if its destination and his were the same.

After a few more minutes of driving, he came to a side road, marked with a fresh set of tire tracks. There was a house about half a mile off the main road. He looked at the odometer on the jeep's panel: 12.2 kilometers. He had found the Edmondson Station.

Garver turned the jeep onto the side road. It was badly rutted, with large stones jutting up in places. It took all his concentration to navigate it.

He didn't pay much attention to the house until he was close and was slowing the jeep to a stop. It was badly rundown, paint long peeled away off the boards. There wasn't a full pane of glass in any of the windows. Like most Australian houses, it had a wide porch. As Garver sat in the jeep and studied the place, he was aware of someone watching him. The rear end of the station wagon was poking around the corner of the house.

Because of the sun, it was hard to see into the shadows of the porch. He heard a noise. It sounded like a board squeaking. A pair of feet, shod in short boots, moved out of the darkness and stood in the sunlight. The shadow of the porch cut the legs off at the knee.

Garver became aware of how dry his mouth was. There was a funny something wiggling around in the bottom of his stomach. Something was very wrong here.

"Something I can do for you, friend?" It was an American voice, quiet and calm.

Garver swallowed and said, "I'm looking for a man named Theodore

Howell. He's supposed to live here. This is the Edmondson Station, isn't it?"

"It is. I'm Ted Howell."

Garver reached for the pocket of his khaki shirt. "I've got something for you."

The man on the porch stepped out all the way into the light. He was in his middle thirties, with dark hair and a thin face. His wide mouth was set in a line. The rifle in his hands made Garver freeze.

"That's good. Stay still. You're not following our orders at all, are you? Has Whittington gone crazy? He knows he can't play games with us!"

If this was a game, Garver didn't know the rules, or even that he had been playing. The sun seemed hotter than ever as he said, "What do you mean? I don't know any Whittington."

Howell motioned slightly with the rifle. "Get out of that jeep. Take it slow and easy."

Garver got out of the jeep carefully, taking pains not to make any sudden moves that might alarm the other man. It had been a long time since he had faced a man with a gun, but he remembered well the knee-shaky feelings he was experiencing right now.

Garver could see that Howell was nervous, too. The man was holding a tight rein on himself. That made him even more dangerous.

"Look," Garver began, "there must be some mistake —"

"Be quiet. Cecil! Search him, but be careful."

The Aborigine he had seen back in Normanton came out of the shadows and approached him. The native ran his hands quickly over Garver's body, then stepped back and announced, "Nothing. No guns, no money."

"All right," Howell said, "let's go into the house and get out of the sun. Cecil, go through the jeep. Maybe the money's there."

GARVER STEPPED UP ONTO THE PORCH and went into the house first, very conscious of Howell behind him with the gun. Howell waved at a dilapidated sofa and said, "Sit down. But watch out for broken springs. This is hardly the lap of luxury. You were supposed to change all that."

Garver sat down. The only other piece of furniture in the room was a straight-backed chair. Howell sat down on it, keeping the muzzle of the gun pointed in Garver's general direction.

Garver took a deep breath and said, "Mr. Howell, you've got the wrong idea about me. My name is Allen Garver, and I'm a private investigator from San Francisco —"

"San Francisco, huh? Whittington got himself some imported talent. I admit I was surprised when Cecil told me there was a big Yank asking questions in town. Well, it won't do Whittington any good. He's still not going to get his boy back until he comes across with the money."

Garver suddenly remembered the headlines in a newspaper he had glanced at briefly in Cairns. Even though the air in the room was stifling, he felt cold all the way down to his toes as he realized what he had stumbled into.

A female voice dripping with scorn came from the doorway. "Ted, did it ever occur to you that the man may be telling the truth?"

The woman was just a silhouette against the glare as she stood in the door. Howell sounded anxious as he said, "Whittington's just trying to be tricky, Fran, but he doesn't fool me."

"Anyone could fool you." She moved into the room. Garver's pulse, already racing, quickened a bit more as he looked at the coppery hair and deep green eyes. She wore a shirt and jeans that emphasized her slim, strong figure.

"You shouldn't talk like that, especially in front of other people." Howell's voice was bitter. "I planned this job, didn't I?"

Fran paused in front of Garver and looked intently at him before turning back to Howell and saying, "You didn't tell me we'd have to hide out just this side of Hell."

Garver didn't remember any mention of this woman in the dossier on Howell that he had read. He must have picked her up since his flight from the States. Another displaced American, judging from her voice, from the Midwest, perhaps.

There were more important things to worry about right now, though. He wished he had read those newspaper articles more closely. All he could recall were the headlines: "No Leads in Whittington Kidnaping," "Industrialist Pleads for Release of Son," "Intensive Search Underway."

He had to talk fast, and he had to make them pay attention to what he was saying, "Listen, you don't have to do this. My name's Allen Garver, like I said, and I'm —"

"I know who you are," Howell cut in. "You're Whittington's stooge and both of you are trying to make a fool out of me. I'll show you, though. I'll show all of you."

Before Garver could answer, Cecil stuck his head in the door and said, "Nothing in the jeep. Dust coming this way, though."

Fran went to the door and squinted out. "He's right. Maybe this is it."

Howell stood up and backed away from Garver. He said, "All right. I'll go out on the porch. Fran, you watch the kid. Cecil, stay here with this guy. You both know what to do if anything goes wrong."

Howell stepped out on the porch and Fran went through a door into an adjoining room, shutting it behind her. Cecil pulled a small pistol from his pocket and sat down in the chair. Howell put his head back in long enough to say, "Maybe you were telling the truth after all, Garver. Sorry you got mixed up in this."

Garver sat tensely and wondered what he could do. Cecil's pistol wouldn't pack much punch, but then Howell was right outside. Besides, the Aborigine was heavily-muscled and probably wouldn't have any trouble taking Garver with his hands.

THROUGH A BROKEN WINDOW, GARVER SAW ANOTHER JEEP approaching rapidly. It didn't stop when it got close to the house. It made a sharp circle, throwing up more dust. A package sailed through the air and landed in the dirt just in front of the porch. By the time it landed, the jeep was accelerating away.

Cecil sighed in relief. "Just right, man," he said, almost to himself. "Now we don't got to kill the kid."

Howell was crouching, poised, on the porch. He reminded Garver of a snake. He waited until the jeep was out of sight before he went out to pick up the package.

When he had it in his hands, his fingers tore the wrappings off hurriedly. Garver saw green bills tumble to the ground as Howell whooped, "It's here! All of it! It's here!"

The door to the next room opened and Fran hurried out, almost at a run. She left it open this time and Garver could see a small boy lying very still on a cot. He turned to the grinning Cecil and said, "Is that boy all right?"

"Oh, sure. He just doped up, that's all."

Howell and Fran came in laughing, their earlier friction forgotten. Howell had his arms full of money.

"How about it?" he said excitedly. "Whittington came through, just like we told him to. How about that?"

Cecil picked up a bill that had fluttered to the floor and rubbed it between his fingers. "That's nice," he breathed.

Garver was trying to decide what would happen now. He didn't believe Howell had anything good in store for him. Even though he was only an accidental witness, he was still a threat to them, now that he

knew about the kidnapping.

Howell put the rifle down and slid an arm around Fran's waist. He was still laughing and his face was flushed with excitement and triumph. He steered Fran toward the other room and said, "Come on, darling. We've got some celebrating to do."

She held back. "The boy's in there."

"Yeah, and he's sound asleep, too! Don't argue with a rich man, baby." Just before he closed the door behind them, he said, "Watch him close, Cecil."

Cecil laughed and said, "Sure, man."

When the door was closed, Cecil said. "You go sit in the chair. Sofa ain't much, but it beats that hard chair. I'm a man of leisure now."

Garver crossed over to the chair and sat down slowly, every wheel in his brain spinning. He said, "How did you ever get mixed up with a loser like Howell, Cecil? He's no criminal."

"You crazy, man? He got us all this money, didn't he? Why you call him a loser?"

"Money won't do you much good in prison. How does he plan to get away?"

"We cut down through the big deserts. I know ways, ways that gets water and places to stop. You just got to know where you going."

"What about the boy?"

"We take him with us. That way nobody chases us. When it's time, we leave him someplace safe, let his pop know where he is."

"Well, maybe that's not too bad a plan. I've only got one question."

"Yeah?"

"What do you need Howell for now?"

Cecil's face was contemplative for a moment, then broke into a big grin. "I know what you trying to do. You trying to turn me against him. Won't work, man. Won't work."

Garver gave a mental shrug and shut up. Maybe he had planted a seed, anyway.

TO PASS THE TIME, Cecil kept up a running conversation about what he was going to do with his share of the money. When he had finished with the riotous details, he said, "Then I going to see Ayers Rock. I never seen it."

"What's that?"

"Big rock, right smack in the middle of the country. Nothing around it, just flat, then all of a sudden there it is, thousand feet high and two miles long. The color of blood, they say. Back in Dreamtime, after the

gods made everything, they all tired and lay down on Ayers Rock to rest. I got to see it, got to see it for myself."

"Got to see what for yourself?" Fran asked, opening the door and coming back into the room.

"Never mind," Howell said, hurrying out behind her. "It's time for us to move now. There's no telling how long Whittington can keep a leash on the police."

"Hey, man," Cecil said, "this guy here tried to be tricky. Tried to tell me I don't need you no more."

Howell stopped in front of Garver and said, "Did you do that? What's your part in this, Garver? Are you Whittington's man or not? If you are, he didn't get his money's worth."

"I told you who I was."

"I know what you told me. If you really are a private eye, you can't be from the family of that girl back home; my brother paid them off. Maybe you had a little blackmail scheme of your own, eh? Well, you've gone a little too far out on the limb. We're going to have to chop it off."

Fran put a hand on his arm. "What are you talking about? I thought we'd just tie him up and leave him here."

"He knows who I am. We can't leave him behind to tell everyone who pulled this job. And I'll be damned if I'm going to lug him along."

"You said there wouldn't be any killing."

"There wouldn't have been if he hadn't come stumbling in on his own. Now get the kid ready to travel."

She looked at him steadily and said, "I knew you were pretty low, Ted. I've heard about how you attacked that girl and how your brother saved your skin with his money. But I didn't think you'd actually kill anyone."

Howell gave her a push. "Go do like I told you."

Her hand came up and cracked across his face. The noise was loud in the hot, still room.

Howell didn't move, other than to raise a hand to the red mark on his face. He stared at Fran for a moment, then said, "Maybe you'd rather stay here with Garver. How would you feel about that?"

She backed away, eyes regarding him as they would a spider. The rifle was leaning against the wall behind her. Garver had noticed it earlier and taken it as another sign of Howell's inexperience in matters like this. Cecil had been between him and it at the time, however.

Now Howell took a quick step toward Fran and she spun away from him. Her eyes fell on the gun. She grabbed it just as Howell grabbed her.

Cecil took his eyes away from Garver to watch the struggle.

Garver knew it was the only chance he would get.

He came out of the chair, foot swinging in a kick. Cecil saw it coming, twisted and took it on his thigh, but it still staggered him. Garver followed with two quick punches to the head, then grabbed Cecil's gun arm.

Howell ripped the rifle out of Fran's grip and backhanded her across the face, knocking her away from him. He turned to see Garver wrestling with Cecil and fired one shot quickly, without aiming.

Garver felt something slam into his left shoulder. It sent pain racing through him, but suddenly the gun was slipping easily out of Cecil's fingers. Garver found the trigger as Cecil slumped against him and pulled it as fast as he could.

Only one of the shots hit, but that one shattered Howell's kneecap and made him forget about Garver and everything else but the pain. He and the rifle hit the floor about the same time.

Garver stepped back and let Cecil fall to the floor. There was a small red stain on the Aborigine's back, a much larger one in front. Garver had a gash in his shoulder, but he knew what Howell's bullet could have done to him if it hadn't hit Cecil first and deflected.

Fran was huddled against the wall, sobbing with shock and fear. Garver looked into the other room and saw that the boy was beginning to stir feebly. The sedative was wearing off. Well, there wouldn't be any more shots of any kind for a while. He could go home and sleep away the terror in his own bed.

Garver looked at the pistol in his hand and knew how very lucky he had been. He shook his head and knelt beside Howell, who was holding his knee and moaning through tightly-clenched teeth.

"You should have let me have my say when I got here," he told Howell, not knowing if the man could understand him through the haze of pain. "You should have held off on this crazy plan a little while longer."

Howell's glassy eyes focused on him. Fran turned her tear-streaked face from the wall and looked at him, too.

"I work for the lawyers that represented your brother. We've been trying to locate you for nearly three weeks. Your brother's car went off the road at Big Sur. He was killed instantly. The whole estate went to you, Howell. All one hundred and seventy million of it."

Garver stood up wearily as Fran started to laugh.

He wondered if those gods of Cecil's resting on Ayers Rock were laughing, too.

The dead woman was sprawled on the bed. The knife was on the floor. It was an unusual case, to say the least. Mansen shook his head. No, unusual wasn't a strong enough word for this one!

Don't the Windows Look Nice?

by PAUL YOUNG

DETECTIVE PAUL MANSEN STEPPED AROUND THE BICYCLE in the entrance hall of the apartment and sucked in his breath when he saw the mess on the living room floor. He had been warned to expect something different. Well, they were right about that.

The medical examiner beckoned to him, saying, "She's in the bedroom." Mansen nodded without speaking. He lingered for a moment and then moved in the direction indicated by the medical examiner. The bedroom was decorated in soft shades of blue which faded into black where the rays from the bare lightbulb failed to penetrate. The torn lamp shade lay on the floor. Glass from a shattered mirror crunched under Mansen's shoes.

The woman was sprawled on her back on one of the beds — clothes rumpled, mouth slightly open. Mansen leaned forward, his hands jammed in his coat pockets. He studied the face. Alive, she had been pleasant looking but not particularly attractive. In death, everything was different. Her features were more like a plastic mask, and not a pretty one.

"Lady, it's a hell of a way to solve problems," Mansen said sympathetically.

"Name's Dorothy Barstow," the medical examiner volunteered. "Sleeping pills," he noted matter-of-factly. "The knife she used is there on the floor between the beds."

Covering the body with a blanket, he handed Mansen several sheets of paper. "It's all there. This one was unusual, no doubt about that," he said before leaving.

Mansen sat on the other twin bed, next to a robe and a pair of men's pajamas. He put on his glasses and began to read.

Thursday, November 22

They're all dead: Craig, Jeff and Sharon, and I'm not sorry. Not one bit!

What kind of person would do this? Well, you see that's the problem. I'm a non-person. No one, no one pays any attention to me. Since Craig is so involved with his accounting firm and belongs to all those service clubs, there is no time left over for me. Jeff and Sharon are busy, like all kids. Anyway, they tend to do more things with their father than with me.

Part of it may be the way I look. I stare in the mirror and I'm sick at what I see. And it's getting worse all the time. My mirror mocks me. Why was Craig ever attracted to me in the first place? What difference does it make now?

Even though I work, I'm expected to keep the house spotless, cook, wash clothes . . . Craig says there isn't enough money to hire someone to help me. No one in my family helps me, or even thanks me for what I do for them. It seems everyone believes that is my role. It finally got to the point where it was hard to get anyone to talk to me, or if they did, for them to really listen to me. But it didn't start out that way. Somewhere it changed. But that's what happens to non-persons. Even Brandy, whom I fed and took to the vet, only tolerated me. Well, I took care of Brandy. I poisoned him!

At least I have a career, or did. There is Mr. Pearlman, my boss, I have to contend with. I am a very good window dresser, but as long as I've been with the store, I've never gotten any promotions. At times I thought about quitting, but I was afraid to. And Mr. Pearlman never compliments me on my work either. If just once he could say something about the store windows. Told me

they look nice. After all, they represent so much effort and imagination.

You know what kind of manager he is? "Employees get a paycheck every two weeks; that's their reward," is how he puts it. Even so, I have to admit that the best part of my life, such as it is, involves my job. I do love to work with the mannequins. They are children, brides and grooms, college students, career women, models and so much more.

I love the rich fabrics that rustle when I work with them and the beautiful clothes and accessories too. Everything is so perfect when I decorate the store windows and at least the people seem to admire them. But that isn't enough!

Out of a clear blue sky Mr. Pearlman — Pearlman the pig! — threatened to fire me. It was just the other day. Which day I forget. He had the gall to tell me that if I didn't shape up, he would have to let me go. What is going on? I work hard. I've been a faithful employee for years. What does he think is wrong with me? Is he like all the rest?

I tried to put it out of my mind, but it seemed to build up with all my other problems. I would wake up early in the morning in the pitch blackness and lie in bed, shaking and afraid. But there was no one to turn to.

However, the worst was yet to come. Craig began acting strangely. I would enter a room to find him talking on the telephone, and he would be very secretive. It didn't take me long to find out why. Yesterday, he announced he was leaving me. All of a sudden, he threw down his newspaper and told me off, circling my chair like some sort of animal.

"Dorothy, I've had a gut-full and I'm leaving. For God's sake, look at me. There's something wrong with you and I can't take it any more. This non-person crap you talk about. You don't make sense.

"The kids need a real mother and by damned they're going to have one. They want to get out

too. Oh, here we go with the tears. Well, cry all you want to, but it's not going to make any difference!" That's how Craig dumped me. Afterward, I had a terrible asthma attack like when I was a child.

It was impossible to sleep last night and today my head felt like it was going to burst. I finally called in sick, saying I had a touch of the flu. I bit through my bottom lip and didn't notice the pain. I didn't know a person could cry that much. Well, it may have been that bad when Daddy died. Daddy, I wish you were here now. He cared for me. He made me think I was someone special. But I guess the change in me really started after Daddy died. But I have trouble remembering things.

I've been sitting here on the bed for a long time now, just thinking. I hurt. I hurt and I want someone else to hurt too. I'm going to get a butcher knife in the kitchen and wait for Craig to come home for his things. The knife is stainless steel, eight or nine inches long, and it gleams in the light. I'll sharpen it over and over — the sound of grinding is nice.

Blood! There's blood everywhere! Oh, now I know. Craig came home at the same time he always does. But I had a surprise for this man who was going to leave me. He walked in the front door and I was holding the knife behind my back. I whipped out the knife and stuck it in his chest with all my strength. Once. Twice. He died right there on his feet. Didn't even cry out. Just had a silly look on his face.

Did the children come in then? They must have surprised me standing there next to Craig's body. I didn't intend to harm the babies; after all, both were difficult births. I almost died with Sharon. But I couldn't control myself. I slashed away with the knife. They weren't fast enough to get away from me. Good riddance!

For just a moment I thought of Pearlman and wished I could have him here. But then I got sick

to my stomach the more I looked at the bodies and vomited until I got the dry heaves.

Time now for the sleeping pills. All of them.

Dorothy Barstow

MANSEN SIGHED AS HE FOLDED THE LETTER and put it in his coat pocket.

"Are you finished, sir?" a young policeman asked from the doorway. "They're here to remove the body."

"Yeah, sure," Mansen grunted as he got to his feet.

"Uh, there's something else. What do you want done with those damned mannequins in the living room? It's creepy, even for this business. They look so real it took me a moment to realize they're just dummies. Hacked up dummies at that!"

"You can put 'em in the trash as far as I'm concerned. Any next of kin?"

"No, not that we know of. What a looney she was, playing with those mannequins like that."

"She wasn't playing," Mansen said as he lit a cigarette and started to leave. "They were her family!"

Continued from page 86

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

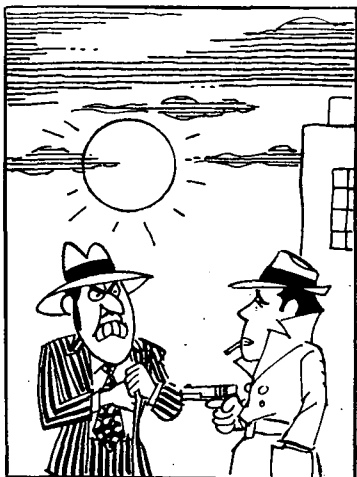
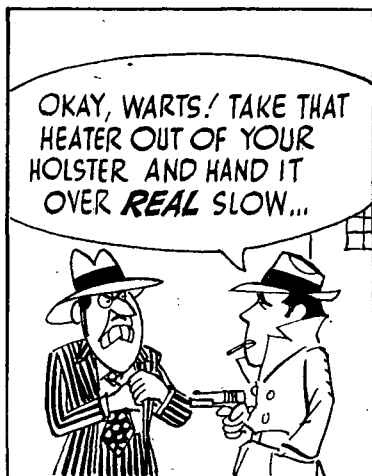
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After thirteen years of formal education, and four years of assorted jobs in Philadelphia, PA, I got married and became a housewife in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, D.C. Twenty years fled swiftly as I co-ordinated the lives of a successful husband, a charming daughter, one neurotic dog, and two domineering cats.

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Mike Shamus

by FRED FREDERICKS



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Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS by JOHN BALL

As everyone who writes professionally will tell you, plot coincidence is something that pops up all the time. This month we have two different books, undoubtedly written independently, in which the key element is the breakout from jail of political prisoners, once in Greece and once in the Philippines. In both cases the rescue is to be made by air and involves a tricky short field landing within the prison itself. And, to cap it all, in both places skilled female pilots are called upon to do the flying.

One of these is *Once A Spy* by Robert Footman. Retired CIA agent Harry Ryder, who is a remarkable linguist, is engaged by the State Department to attempt to get two people out of a closely-guarded prison in the Philippines. To help bring this about he engages an actress/model who is a qualified Cessna 210 pilot. Of course they fall in love, and to complicate matters there is an old political enemy in Washington who is trying to muddy the waters for Ryder. The story is quite a good one most of the time, but the actual rescue takes place "off stage," which cheats the reader of much of the excitement he has anticipated. It is against the policy of this column to give away plot conclusions, but we can comment that the author made use of a device in regards to his heroine which would better have been avoided. (Dodd Mead, \$9.95)

The other prison-rescue book is *Runway to Death* by Macartney Filgate. It is told in the first person by British pilot Charlotte Eliot who inherits an aircraft she has been flying for her employer. When she sells it to a client in the Greek islands, she flies it there under bad weather conditions to make delivery. Then she becomes involved and although it is not her fight, she agrees to pilot the plane on the rescue attempt. This time we are treated to a box seat for all the excitement and to give the author his due, the flying is remarkably realistic. Any

pilot — and one is writing this — will be with Charlotte all the way. The plot is smoothly constructed, the revelations come at well-timed intervals, and the supporting action is very realistic. We are promised more of Charlotte which, gives us something very pleasant to anticipate. (Walker, \$9.95)



One of the treasures of the mystery/suspense field is the writings of the late Arthur Upfield whose tales of Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte in Australia are required reading at many universities for their anthropological content. Much in the same vein are the stories of Dr. Quarshie, a black physician in West Africa. As in Upfield, the use of background and of indigenous culture is outstanding. The latest in this fine series is *A Tiger in Red Weather* by John Wyllie, a gentleman who obviously knows his subject on a profound level. He is also an excellent writer and the combination is very potent indeed. To compare Wyllie to Upfield is high praise indeed, but he deserves it. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$8.95)



The very prolific Elizabeth Linington is with us again, this time with two titles, *A Choice of Crimes* (as by Leslie Egan) and *Consequence of Crime* under her own name. Miss Linington writes briskly and well, but her departures from proper police procedure are at times appalling. In view of her large audience, it would certainly be to its benefit, and hers, if she were to take just a little time to visit some police facilities and learn how things are actually done. For one thing, detectives do not drive their own highly individual sports cars to the scenes of crime and thereby give away their private license numbers. We have been told that Miss Linington once stated publically that she had never been in a police station in her life. This may be quite untrue, but her writing suggests that it could well be the case. (Doubleday Crime Club, both titles are priced at \$8.95)



Motor City Blue by Loren D. Estleman is a private eye story laid in Detroit. Amos Walker is the eye and he encounters practically every cliché in the business: the top gangster client, the missing daughter (in this case a ward), frequent beatings up, and the cop friend (yes,

he's a lieutenant) with whom the eye is constantly both cooperating and fighting. After this is said, it needs to be added that the writing is superior, the plotting better than average, and the use of background in most cases excellent. The author's photograph on the dust jacket suggests that he may do a Mickey Spillane on us and play his own character. The picture certainly suggests that he would be well qualified. (Houghton Mifflin, \$9.95)



What is a month's new mysteries without a British police procedural? We have a good one in *The Chief Inspector's Daughter* by Sheila Radley. Chief Inspector Quantrill makes his second appearance accompanied by Sergeant Martin Tait. This pair of detectives is engaged in unraveling the mysterious death of romantic novelist Jasmine Woods. The plotting is firm and tight and the conclusion is entirely acceptable; however, it must be noted that the single vital clue that unlocks the whole thing is withheld from the reader, although it could be inferred by the very sharp. The author, incidentally, under another literary incarnation, also writes romantic novels. There is considerable discussion of the value of this type of literature, wherein the author gets in her legitimate comments on such escapism. (Scribner's, \$8.95)



MORE BRIEFLY NOTED: Julian Symons, whose reputation is totally secure, has given us a delightful fictionalization of a well-known British murder of almost a century ago in *Sweet Adelaide*. It's from Harper and Row at \$11.95.

Fans of Erle Stanley Gardner will welcome something new in *The Science Fiction Stories of Erle Stanley Gardner*, titled *The Human Zero*, which is one of the stories included. Dating back to the 1920's and 30's, these stories show their age, but they are still the work of a very deft hand and some are genuinely exciting. (Morrow, \$12.95)

Josephine Bell, who is one of the old hands in the genre, tells a good story in *Wolf! Wolf!*, but missing this time is the riveting suspense of which the author is a master as revealed in other works. (Walker, \$9.95)

The art world revealed by (Sir) Edwin Leather is unfurled once more in *The Duveen Letter*. Art historian Rupert Conway appears again with enough exciting action to guarantee a good read and more. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$8.95)



AND IN PAPERBACK: The famous classic *Before the Fact* by Francis Iles is back once more, this time in a Perennial edition priced at \$1.95. If you've seen the Hitchcock film, be advised that the late master of suspense changed the ending and thereby did the author, and the viewer, dirt. The original is much better.

Robert Louis Stevenson's immortal *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which is to be featured on the splendid *Mystery* TV series, is once more available, this time in Penguin. It is rather surprisingly priced at \$2.95 since the work is in the public domain and no royalties need be paid. ●

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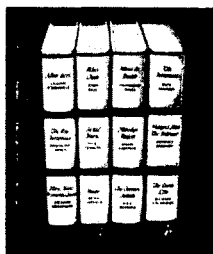
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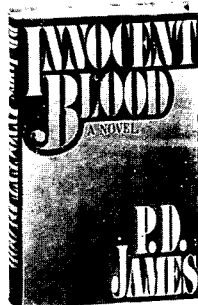
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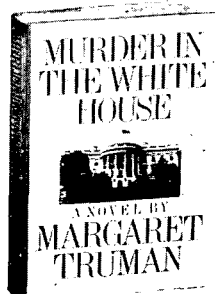
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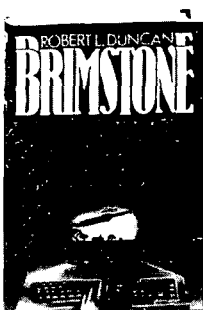
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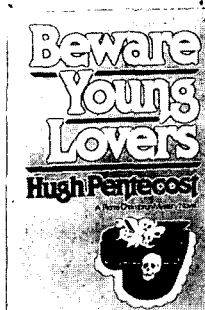
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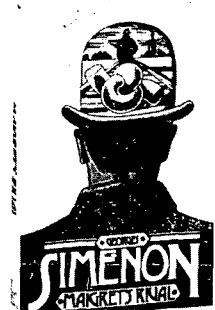
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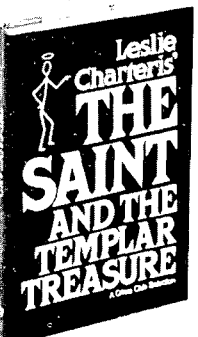
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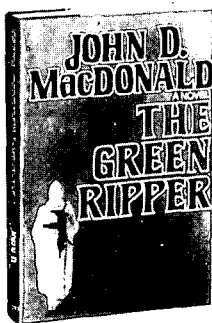
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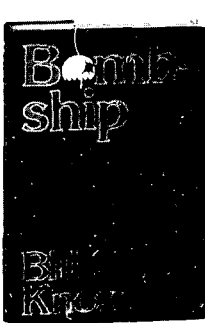
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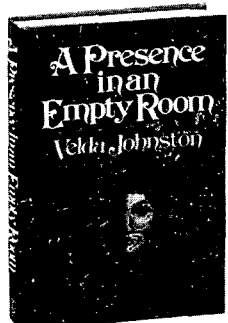
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